PART I

ETERNAL WISDOM

UPADESHAMRITAM

SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI

ETERNAL WISDOM

Upadeshamritam

VOLUME 1

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Volume 1

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Let my every action Be a worship of You With total self-surrender, Let every sound falling from my lips Be a chant of Your great mantra, Let each movement of my hands Be a mudra in worship of You,
Let every step I take Be a circumambulation of You,
Let all my food and drink Be offerings in Your sacred fire, Let my repose Be a prostration to You.
Mother, let each act of mine, And every comfort, Be a worship of You.

FOREWORD

Rare indeed are the mahatmas (great souls) endowed with the vision of seeing the entire universe within the Atman (Self), and the Atman within the universe. Even if they are recognized, they may not be in dined to communicate with us or counsel us, immersed as they are in the eternal silence of the Self Therefore, it is our great fortune when a fully realized mahatma is ready to advise and discipline us with the tender love of a mother, and the inexplicable compassion of a guru. Throughout the world today, the darshan and the nectareous words of Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi are effecting transformations in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. This book, though incomplete, is a precious collection of conversations between the Holy Mother and Her disciples, devotees, and inquiring visitors during the period from June 1985 to September 1986.

The wisdom of the mahatmas, who have come with the mission of uplifting the world, has both immediate and eternal meaning. Even though they elucidate values that are everlasting, they are attuned to the call of the times in which they live, and their words are in response to the heartbeat of their listeners.

Mother speaks Her immortal words, which transform society, at a time when man has lost his traditional values, nobler sentiments, and peace of mind in the frenzied attempt to reinforce the outer world of sensory pleasures, power, and prestige. Man's senseless pursuit of these distractions, while he remains oblivious of his own Self, has cost him the harmony and graciousness of his life. Lack of faith, fear, and a sense of competition has destroyed personal ties and family relations. Love has become no more than a mirage in a culture of excessive consumerism.

Selfless love of God gives way to a form of devotion that is driven entirely by desires. Man gives undue importance to an intellect that seeks the yield of immediate profit, while discarding the lasting glory promised by true wisdom. Lofty spiritual principles and noble experiences do not shine in the lives of the people, but are confined to mere words. It is at such a juncture that Mother speaks to us in a language of untainted devotion, a language of the heart, of wisdom, and of the love that is Her entire life. Her ambrosial words have both an immediate and eternal relevance.

The wisdom of Mother, who has personally listened to countless problems confided by hundreds of thousands of people, shows Her deep insight into the human condition. She recognizes their needs and descends to the level of the rationalist, the believer, the scientist, the ordinary man, the housewife, the businessman, the scholar, and the illiterate‚€”man, woman, or child‚€”and gives each one the appropriate answer, befitting their requirements.

Mother points at Her own life and declares, "As I see everything as the Truth, or Brahman, I bow to that Truth;
I bow to my Self. I serve everyone, seeing them as the Self." She accepts advaita (non-duality) as the ultimate truth; yet the path that She commonly prescribes is a harmonious blend of mantra japa, meditation on a divine form, devotional singing, archana, satsang and selfless service to the world.

Her advice is not just theoretical, but highly practical and rooted in daily living. Her instructions shed light on the need for spiritual training and sadhana (spiritual practice) in the life of the individual and in society, the role of selfless service in the search for the Self, the importance of sincere prayer with devotion, and pure love. She also addresses issues concerning the code of conduct for the householder, the problems of daily life, the dharma of the relationship between man and woman, and practical guidelines for spiritual seekers, sometimes offering riddles of a philosophical nature.

We hear Her exhorting Her children to follow spirituality in their lives, to give up luxuries, to eliminate bad habits, and to serve those who suffer: "Children, God-realization is the real aim of the." Spirituality is not blind faith; it is the ideal that eliminates darkness. It is the principle that teaches us to face any adverse circumstance or obstacle with a smile. It is a teaching for the mind. Mother points out that we can effectively utilize all other learning only if we acquire this knowledge.

Mother s infinite wisdom emerges as words of comfort to those seeking solace from the problems of life, as answers to questions posed by those who are inquisitive about spirituality, and

as instructions given from time to time to Her disciples. She gives each answer according to the nature and circumstances of the questioner. Even when the questioner is unable to express his ideas fully, Mother, who knows the language of the heart, gives the appropriate answer. An answer from Mother, even before a doubt in the mind is expressed, is a common experience of those who come to Her.

In answer to a question explicitly put to Her by one person, it is Her practice to often include advice for a silent listener as well. Only the silent individual will understand that this was an answer for him. When one studies Mother s teachings, these special qualities should be kept in mind.

The words of a mahatma have many levels of meaning. We should absorb the meaning that is most appropriate for us. A well-known story in the Upanishads narrates that when Lord Brahma uttered the word 'da,' the demons interpreted it as advice to show compassion (daya), the humans as a call to give (daan), and the celestials as an injunction to practice restraint (dama).

Sweet is the experience of listening to Mother, and watching Her speak with vivid expressions and gestures, in a language that is simple, and at the same time, embellished with extremely appropriate stories and analogies drawn from life around Her. The love that shines in Mother's eyes, Her radiant, compassionate face, remain alive in the mirror of the listeners' mind as objects of meditation.

There is no scarcity of spiritual literature today, yet the sad fact remains that the highest ideals are confined to peoples' tongues, but are not found in their lives. Mother, however, speaks on the basis of Her daily life. She never gives advice that She Herself does not demonstrate in Her own life. She frequently reminds us that spiritual principles and mantras are not meant to remain on our lips, but are to be translated into our lives as well. The secret behind the deep spiritual principles flowing in a continuous stream from Mother, who has not studied the scriptures or taken instruction from a guru, is nothing but Her direct experience of the Self.

The lives of the mahatmas form the very foundation of the scriptures. Mother's sayings such as, "The whole world belongs to the one who knows Reality," "Kindness towards the poor is our duty to God," "If you take refuge in God, He will bring what you need when you need it," are mirrors of Her own life. In each of Her movements, there is the dance of compassion for the whole world, and love for God. Indeed, this unity of thought, word, and deed in Mother s life is the basis of Her statement that Her children do not need to study any other scripture if they analyse and study Her own life carefully. Mother shines in the midst of society as a living embodiment of Vedanta.

The mahatmas who sanctify the world through their presence are tirthas, holy places of pilgrimage, on the move. As regular pilgrimages and temple worship purify our minds when practiced for many years, so a single darshan, touch, or word from a mahatma sanctifies us and deposits in us seeds of exalted samskara.

The words of the mahatmas are not mere sounds. The mahatmas shower their grace along with their words. Their words are bound to awaken Consciousness, even in someone who listens without understanding their meaning. When these words appear in the form of a book, their study becomes the greatest Satsang and meditation. Mahatmas like Mother, who have experienced Reality, transcend time and space. Reading or hearing Mother's immortal words enables us to maintain an unseen inner bond with Her and to become fit to receive Her blessings. That is the real greatness of the study of such books.

We humbly offer this collection of Mother's immortal words to the readers, with the prayer that it may inspire them to emulate the lofty spiritual ideals that shine throughout Her life, and to progress on the path of the ultimate Truth.

The publishers

CHAPTER ONE

Monday, June 3, 1985

Dawn was breaking through the grove of coconut trees on the ashram grounds. One could hear the sweet notes of the tambura from Mother's room. Since the tambura had been given to Her recently by a devotee, Mother had been playing it for quite a while in the mornings. Mother picked up the instrument only after touching it with reverence and bowing to it. She bowed to it again when She put it down.

To Mother, everything is a form of God. She has often said that we should consider all musical instruments as forms of Devi Saraswathi. During bhajans, one cannot tell exactly when Mother puts down the bells She has been playing, for She puts them down with such reverence and attention.

THE MOTHER WHO NEVER RESTS

Mother came to the darshan hut just after nine in the morning. Several devotees were already there waiting for Her.

Mother: "Children, have you been here for long?" A devotee: "Just a short while. We were lucky today, because we were able to hear Amma play the tambura. "Mother: "Amma lost track of time playing it. She did not have time to sleep after the bhava darshan last night. There were many letters to read, and by the time they were all read, it was morning. Gayatri pressed Her several times to go to bed, but Amma kept saying, 'Just one more.' Then seeing the next letter, Amma couldn't resist opening and reading it. She could feel the sorrow of those children piercing Her own heart. Many of the children do not even expect a reply; all they want is for Amma to read about their grief. How can Amma ignore those prayers? Whenever their sorrow comes to mind. She totally forgets Her own difficulties.

"By the time She had read all the letters, it was morning. She did not go to bed at all. After Her bath, Amma felt She needed some solitude, so She started playing the tambura. Its sound makes Amma lose Her mind. She doesn't feel the passage of time while She is playing it. It was when the clock struck nine, that you children came to mind. So Amma came here immediately!"

There was nothing unusual about Mother's routine that day. Most days are like that. She often has no time to eat or sleep. On bhava darshan nights, it will be very late by the time She returns to Her room; and then She will start reading the letters. Many letters arrive every day, and most of them tell stories filled with tears. Mother reads them all before going to bed. On some days She may have a little time to read letters at noon. But where can She find time to rest, when She pays so much attention to the problems of Her children, who number in the hundreds of thousands? Only on rare occasions will She get more than two hours of sleep. Sometimes, She will get no sleep at all. Yet, when She remembers that Her devotees are waiting for Her, She will forget everything and come running down. By then, all fatigue will be gone from Her face.

ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS

A young woman with soiled clothes and her hair in disarray held an infant in her arms as she approached Mother and prostrated. Her face was stricken with grief.

Mother: "Are you going today, daughter?"

Woman: "Yes, Amma! I have been away from home for three days now."

She put her head on Mother s chest and started sobbing. Mother raised her face and wiped her tears, saying, "Don't worry daughter, everything will be all right."

The woman prostrated in front of Mother again and went out.

A devotee: "I know that young woman. She has changed so much."

Mother: "Her husband had a good job, but he fell into bad company and started drinking. Soon he ran out of cash and asked for her jewellery to pay for his drinking. When she hesitated, he started beating her. So out of fear, she surrendered it all in the end. He sold the jewellery and spent all the money on drink. He would come home drunk every night and pull her down by her hair and beat her up. With all those beatings, look at her condition now! A few days ago there was a fight for the little gold chain around the baby's neck, and she was beaten up very badly. Thus, She picked up the child and came here. They were such a happy family in the beginning. Can any good come from intoxicants? Health, wealth, and peace at home all are lost."

Another woman: "One of our neighbours drinks. Recently, he came home drunk, picked up his daughter who was only a year-and-a-half old, and threw her down violently. What sort of mind could do such a thing! His wife is in sad shape with all the beatings she takes."

Mother: "Children, when alcohol makes a man senseless, he is not even able to recognize his wife and children. He may come home after having been beaten up in a brawl. What kind of happiness does one get from alcohol?

"One just imagines that one gets pleasure from intoxicants. Does happiness reside in cigarettes or alcohol or drugs? There are people who smoke away several hundred rupees per month. That money would be enough for a child's education. Intoxicants may help one forget everything for just a short while, but in reality, the body loses its vitality, the person faces ruin, and failing health leads to untimely death. Those who should be of benefit to the family and country end up destroying themselves and harming others instead."

Devotee: "Amma, why do these people knowingly destroy themselves?"

Mother: "Children, it is a man's selfish search for pleasure that leads him to indulge in smoking and drinking. He thinks that all this means happiness. We should explain the spiritual principles to people. But to do this, we ourselves have to live according to those principles. Then others will emulate us; they will also become goodhearted, and their selfishness will fall away.

**We see people who spend thousands on excessive comfort and pomp. At the same time their neighbour may be starving, or a girl's wedding is called off because her parents can't afford a thousand rupees for the dowry. In another family, a married daughter is sent back home, because she was not given a big enough share of her father's wealth. The neighbours, meanwhile, are spending millions on the marriage of their daughter. Those who have the means, but are not willing to help others in need, do the greatest harm to society. They are also betraying their own souls."

LEADING A SPIRITUAL LIFE TO PURIFY ONE'S CONDUCT

Mother's face became serious. She said in a firm voice: "Children, such selfish minds can be made generous only through spiritual thoughts such as: 'All of us are the same Self; all are the children of the same Mother; the Mother of the Universe. We all breathe the same air. When I was born, I had no name or caste. Caste and religion came much later; therefore, my duty is to break down those barriers and love everyone as brothers and sisters. I can find true happiness in life only through loving and helping others. True worship of God is rendering help to those who are suffering.' We should be immersed in such thoughts; it will make us more expansive, and will broaden our point of view. When we grasp these principles, there will be a real change in our character. We will be filled with compassion.

"Nowadays, most people have only the attitude of I and 'mine.' They think only of their own happiness and that of their family. This is death. It will only ruin themselves and society. Children, to such people we should explain, 'This is not how you should live! You are not little ponds where water stagnates and gets dirtier with time; you are rivers that should flow for the benefit of the world. You are not meant to suffer; you are meant to experience bliss!'

"By flowing into a river, the water from a pond is cleansed; by flowing into a gutter it only gets dirtier. The gutter is the selfish attitude of I and 'mine.' The river is God. Children, let us take refuge in God. We will benefit, whether we win or lose in life. By taking refuge in God, we

experience joy and peace of mind. Peace and prosperity will grow within the family and in the world."

Looking at a devotee sitting nearby. Mother said, "When this son first came to see Amma, he was so drunk, he was unconscious. Some people supported him and brought him in." Mother laughed.

Devotee: "After seeing Amma, I haven't taken another drink. Some of my friends also quit drinking when they saw that I had given up the habit. Now I dislike even hearing about alcohol,"

Mother: "Son, when you changed for the better, didn't some of the others also change at the same time? Didn't that bring peace to their families as well?

"Children, we are born, and we create our own children. But beyond this, what are we doing for the good of the world? It is true that we are taking care of our families, but is that our only duty? How can we get peace just from that? Are we content when death comes? Because we live without knowing the principles of a righteous life, we not only experience sorrow ourselves, but we give sorrow to others as well. We also bring children into this world, who also experience pain and suffering. Isn't this what life is like, today?"

A devotee: "Is Amma saying that we should not have wives and children?"

Mother: "No, Amma is not saying that. She is saying that we should learn to attain peace in this life, instead of spending this lifetime in an animal-like existence. Instead of running after pleasures, we should understand the goal of life, and live for that. Lead a simple life. Give to others what is left after meeting your own needs. Live without causing any harm to others, and teach each other these principles. We should contribute to the creation of a great culture of this kind. Let us be good and virtuous. Let us make our own hearts good and thus help others to become good as well. That is what we need. If we do this, we will always feel peace and contentment within, even if we lack external comforts.

"Even if we cannot render help to others, we should at least not cause them any harm. That in itself is a great service. However, it is not enough. Try to engage in work that will benefit others. Limit everything to what is really needed, and do not undertake anything that is inessential. Food, thoughts, sleep, and talk, all should be limited to what is essential. If we live with that discipline, there will be only good thoughts in our minds. Those who live in this way do not pollute the atmosphere; they sanctify it instead. We should consider such people as our role models."

The faces of the devotees showed how deeply moved they were by Mother's advice for the welfare of the individual and society. They saw that She was giving Her devotees clear guidance on how to conduct the rest of their lives. Prostrating in front of Mother, they felt fulfilled from having spent those priceless moments in Her company,

Monday, June 10, 1985

At ten o'clock in the morning, some brahmacharis and devotees were sitting with Mother in front of the kalari (old temple). On the right side of the kalari was the building that housed the office, library, kitchen, and dining room.

At the back of the building there were three small rooms for the brahmacharis. Mother s family had lived in this house until they moved to a new building. On the left side of the kalari were the Vedanta school, a few huts, Mother's room, and the meditation hall.

THE GURU'S INSTRUCTIONS

Mother: "Amma severely scolded one of Her sons today." She was referring to one of the brahmacharis. Devotee: "Why, Amma?"

Mother: "He went to Kollam the other day to get the car repaired. Before he left, Amma told him to return that same day, whether or not the repairs were done. Nevertheless, he stayed there overnight, because the car was not ready. So when he came back the next day, Amma scolded him. Yesterday he went back to Kollam without telling Her or even leaving Her a note. Today Amma again rebuked him for everything. Amma is unhappy when She has to take Her

children to task, but the quality of a spiritual seeker is shown by the way he obeys instructions. What can Amma do? She appears very cruel towards Her children at times.

"Some patients won't allow the doctor to give them an injection, because they are afraid it will hurt. But the doctor knows that they will not be cured without the it. So he gives them the injections, even if he has to use force and restrain the patients while doing so. If, out of kindness, he refrains from giving the injection, the patient may die. The treatment is unavoidable if the patient is to be cured. Similarly, a real guru makes sure that the disciple obeys him. This is necessary if the disciple is to reach the goal. It is the duty of the guru to make the disciple do what is needed.

"Heating a piece of iron in the furnace, the blacksmith beats on it repeatedly†€”not out of cruelty, but only to give it the desired shape. Someone may cut up a paper into many pieces, only to make a beautiful flower out of it. Similarly, the guru reprimands and disciplines the disciple, only to reveal to the disciple the nature of his own Self. Every punishment that he gives shows his great compassion towards the disciple. The disciple should acquire humility, an attitude of surrender, and the attitude that he is the servant of the guru. Only then will the guru shower his grace upon him, and raise him to the guru's own world. The disciple should have the attitude, 'I am nothing; you are everything. I am only your instrument.'

"Everything except our ego belongs to God. Only the ego is ours, and it is not easy to get rid of it. Only through obedience to the guru can we destroy the ego. When we follow the guru's instructions and bend to his will, the ego will disappear due to his grace.

"A log that floats down the river moves with the flow of the river. Similarly, the disciple should move in accordance with the guru's wish, with an attitude of surrender, and the feeling that 'You are everything.' This is the only way to remove the ego. What power do we possess that we can call 'our will'? Someone says from the top of the stairs.

I am coming down now,' but he falls down dead after descending just ten steps. Aren't there countless instances like that? If it were 'our will,' wouldn't he come all the way down as he said he would? But he wasn't able to do that. Therefore, we have to understand that everything is God's will."

Joining Her hands, Mother prayed aloud, "O Devi, at least from now on, kindly do not make me scold my children! Give them intelligence and discrimination! Give them your blessings!" Mother stayed in that pose for a few moments. Those around Her also joined their hands together, closed their eyes, and prayed.

Tuesday, June 11, 1985

ABODE OF COMPASSION

At four in the afternoon Mother came down to the darshan hut. A snake was at the side of the hut, and the devotees and brahmacharis were trying to remove it. Mother came up to them and said, "Children, don't hurt it! Just throw some sand at it." As if it had heard Mother's words, the snake moved slowly away. The scriptures say:

Many prostrations to the Devi Who resides in all beings In the form of compassion. Mother sat down in the hut and began giving darshan. Coming one by one and prostrating, the devotees surrendered their burdens at Her feet. They whispered in Her ears the desires and problems that gnawed at their peace of mind. Some burst into tears the moment they saw Mother. Those who came to Her, shrugging under the torments of e, left with peaceful and contented minds.

When all the devotees departed, the brahmacharis gathered around Mother.

A brahmachari: "Amma did not talk about anything spiritual today."

Mother: "Son, all the people sitting here were full of suffering. A hungry child does not need a discourse on Vedanta or on spiritual principles. First let us reduce the sorrow of these people; then we can talk about spirituality. How can they absorb anything like that now?

"On the other hand, those who are thirsting for God do not like to talk about anything but God, even when great sorrow befalls them. They will be even-minded in sorrow and in happiness

When happiness comes, they don t lose their minds reveller in it, nor do they collapse in times of grief. They accept both as God's will. They accept both sorrow and joy as His blessing.

"If a thorn pricks your foot when you walk, you will step more carefully. Thus, you may escape falling into a ditch that may be just ahead. God gives us sorrow to save us. True believers will cling to God's feet even in sorrow. In their prayers, they will never ask for happiness. They will never think of selfish gains. But when somebody who suffers comes to us, we should give him solace. We should find time to speak a few comforting words."

Seeing the sorrow of others as Her own, Mother finds delight in taking on the burdens the suffering. She is the sacrificial fire into which everyone's prarabdha is offered, and the beacon light of hope for all those who suffer.

Mother came out of the temple after the bhava darshan, and everyone gathered around Her. Most of the devotees were planning to leave by the morning bus, so they anxiously crowded around Mother in order to prostrate to Her once more, and receive Her blessings before leaving. One young man, however, did not approach Mother. He sat alone on the porch of the meditation room, away from the crowd. A brahmachari asked him, "Aren't you going to Amma?"

Young Man: "No."

Br: "When everyone is anxious to be near Mother and to talk to Her, why are you sitting here alone?"

Young Man: "I have also been like them. Normally, I wait outside the kalari, wanting to be the first to prostrate to Mother as She comes out, but today my mind doesn't allow me to go near Her. I am such a sinner."

Br: "I don't believe that. You are imagining something. What mistake did you make that won't let you go near Mother?"

Young man: "I live in Kollam. For a few years I drank regularly, and this led me to fight with my wife. I sent her back to her parents. My family and neighbours hated me. I didn't have a friend in the world. So I finally decided to end my life. At that point I had the immense good fortune to get Amma's darshan. That was a turning point in my life.

"After my first darshan, I stopped drinking completely. There was a great change in my behaviour, and people changed their opinion of me. But today I drank again. Some friends and I had gone to a wedding, and on the way back, they wanted to drink. They pressed me to join them, and I yielded. Later though, I couldn't bear my sense of guilt; I came straight here. Earlier I had no feeling of guilt, however much I drank. But now it is different. (His voice was cracking as he spoke.) Now I find it hard to even look at Mother's face."

Br: "This remorse itself is atonement for your mistake. Don't worry. Tell Mother everything. All your worries will be over."

Young Man: "I know that I need only to bow down in front of Her, and all my uneasiness will be gone; that has been my experience. But that's not what's bothering me now. My friends won't leave me alone if I remain at home. Therefore, I would like to stay here for a few days, but I don't have the courage to ask Mother. I feel so weak for having erred again in the eyes of my Mother, who showers me with more love than the mother who gave birth to me."

His eyes were filled with tears. The brahmachari did not have the words needed to console the young man, but someone was there who understood the throbbing pain in his heavy heart...

After showing the other devotees where to sleep, Mother went to the young man, who immediately got up and stood reverently with joined hands. Mother held both his hands in Hers and asked, "Are you so weak, my son?"

Tears flowed down his cheeks. Mother wiped them away as She continued, "Son, stop worrying. Why feel sorry about what is past? Don't go with those people when they call you again, that's all.

"Once, a temple and a liquor shop both kept parrots as pets. While the temple parrot chanted Vedic mantras, the parrot in the liquor shop uttered obscenities. Son, one's conduct is determined by the company one keeps. If we sit in a room with the TV on, we will end up looking at it. If we don't want to look at it, we have to turn it off or go to another room. If we associate with bad people, we will pick up their habits. So we have to take special care not to fall into such company. Son, if you have some problem on your mind, you can come to Amma. Amma is here for you. Stay here for a few days. Get some books from the library to read."

Mother turned to the brahmachari. "Make arrangements for this son to stay upstairs in the house on the north side."

When the young man heard these loving words from the Mother who knew every thought in his mind, he could not control himself He burst into tears again.

Wiping his tears with loving hands, Mother consoled him, "Son, go to bed now. Amma will talk to you tomorrow.

After sending the young man away with the brahmachari. Mother went to the coconut grove in front of the ashram, accompanied by a woman who had waited a long time for a chance to talk to Her in private. By the time Mother went to Her room after comforting her, it was past three in the morning.

Wednesday, June 12, 1985

BHAKTI YOGA

Mother came to the kalari, accompanied by four brahmacharis and some householder devotees who had come to the ashram for the first time. Mother was talking to them about the importance of having pure devotion to God.

Mother: "Amma's prayer used to be this: O Devi, I just want to love you. It's all right if you don't give me your darshan; just give me a heart that loves everyone! It's all right if you don't love me, but please let me love you!' A person who really loves God is like someone suffering from a fever. He won't have any taste for food. He won't savor salty or sour dishes; even sweet dishes will taste bitter to him. He won't be very interested in food at all. But it is very unusual for a seeker to feel this kind of love in the beginning. Therefore, in the beginning one should try to control one's various habits with shraddha? Especially in the matter of food. If the mind wanders off to external things, one should bring it back, again and again, to the thought of God. Not a single moment should be wasted."

A devotee: "Amma, I don't waste any time. Either I come here to be with you, or I go to the temple. Isn't that all I can do?"

Mother: "Coming here or going to a temple is fine, but our aim should be to purify the mind. If we can't make our minds pure, everything is a waste. Don't think that we can find peace without making our mind and our actions pure. We should remember this when we go to see a mahatma or visit a temple. We should have an attitude of surrender. But these days, most people worry about reserving a room in the lodge even before they leave home for a pilgrimage. The moment they start the trip, they begin talking about family and neighbours. Even when they are back at home, this does not stop. God is just forgotten in the middle of all this.

"We may visit any number of mahatmas or temples, or make any number of offerings, but only through our sadhana will we get any benefit. Our hearts must be tuned to God. Just going to Tirupati or Varanasi does not bring liberation. One doesn't necessarily gain much, spiritually or materially, just by circumambulation the temples or bathing in holy rivers

Shraddha in Sanskrit means faith rooted in wisdom and experience, whereas the same term in Malayalam is used to denote attentive awareness in any action. Mother often uses the term in the latter sensing in those places. If one could get liberation by going to Tirupati, all the businessmen there would be liberated by now, wouldn't they?

"Wherever you go, don't forget God's name. Look at the 'metal' that is mixed with concrete for fixing the roads. Only if the metal is clean, will the concrete set properly. In the same way, only if we purify our hearts through japa, can we install God within. To purify the mind, there is no better way than chanting the divine name.

"When TV programs are transmitted from the studio, we can see them at home only if we turn on the television set. Wouldn't it be useless to blame others if you can't see anything on the TV, because you haven't turned it on? God's grace always flows to us, but to benefit from it, we have to be tuned to His world. What good is it to stay inside with all the doors closed and complain that it is dark when the sun is shining brightly outside? If we just open the doors of our hearts, we can receive the grace that God is constantly showering upon us.

"The soil turns into mud when it rains, and then it causes trouble for everyone. The rain that falls on sand is also wasted. But the seashell utilizes a single drop of water it receives to form a priceless pearl. God showers his compassion on us constantly. How we benefit from it depends on how we receive it inwardly.

"Children, until we tune ourselves to the world of God, we will produce only the jarring notes of ignorance, not Chunks of broken granite divine music. We will have to put up with our lack of perfection. There is no use blaming others for it.

"We are willing to wait for a bus, however long it takes. We don't mind spending the whole day at the courthouse pursuing some legal matter or other. Yet we have no patience when we visit a mahatma or go to a temple. When you go to an ashram or a temple, spend some time there, remembering God with devotion. Chant the divine name and meditate for a while, or be engaged in some selfless work. Only then will there be some benefit from the visit."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Mother continued: "If our minds are pure, and if we do everything remembering God, His grace will be with us even if we never go to a temple. On the other hand, countless trips to a temple won't do us any good if we cannot stop being selfish or disliking others.

"There were two women who were neighbours. One was a devotee of God and the other a prostitute. The devotee would tell her neighbour, 'What you are doing is very sinful. It will only lead you to hell.' Always remembering this, the prostitute shed tears every day, thinking, 'What a sinner I am! I have no other livelihood; that is why I'm doing this. O God, I'm so sorry! At least in my next life, let me have the chance to pray to you and worship you every day, as my friend is doing! Please forgive my sins!'

"The other woman's disdain for the prostitute and her way of life continued, even when she was in the temple. Finally, both women died, and the attendants from heaven and hell arrived. The prostitute was about to be taken to heaven and the devotee to hell. The supposedly pious woman could not bear this. She asked the divine attendants, 'You are taking to heaven someone who sold her body throughout her life. I worshipped and prayed at the temple daily, yet you are taking me to hell. What kind of justice is this? You must be mistaken.'

"The heavenly attendants replied, 'We are not mistaken. Even when you visited the temple and did puja (ritual worship), you were thinking about the bad actions of the prostitute. On the other hand, even though she was a prostitute, she did not identify with her work; her thoughts were on God. She did not pass a single day without feeling deep remorse for her errors, and asking God for forgiveness. Although forced to earn her living as a prostitute, she was a true devotee. That is why she is going to heaven.'"

FOR SPIRITUAL SEEKERS

The evening bhajans were over. Coming out of the kalari. Mother lay down on the sand between the kalari and the meditation room. The dinner bell rang, and Mother asked the devotees to go and eat. One by one they left; only one or two brahmacharis stayed behind to meditate in Mother s presence.

All the devotees came back after dinner and sat around Mother. One woman placed Mother's feet in her lap and started rubbing them.

Mother: "Did you eat, children?"

A devotee: 'Yes, Amma, all of us ate."

Mother: "You would have eaten tasty dishes at home. There's nothing like that here. You probably didn't get enough."

Another devotee: "We all ate to our satisfaction, Amma. We may have a lot of dishes at home, but nothing tastes as good as what we get here."

Mother (laughing): "Son, you are just saying that out of love for Amma!" Everybody laughed.

A devotee: "Amma, I have a question."

Mother: "Children, you can ask Amma anything."

Devotee: "I heard you tell a brahmachari the other day that we should take a vow of ahimsa (non-violence). We should not be angry with anyone. Even if someone is angry with us, we should try to see God in them, and be loving towards them. Isn't this very hard to practice?"

Mother: "Son, the important thing is not whether we are totally successful in this, but whether we have sincerely made the effort. Those who have dedicated their lives to spirituality should be ready to make some sacrifices. Their life is already set on this path. If someone opposes them, they should treat it as an opportunity created by God to eliminate their ego. They should not fight back under the spell of the ego. Only by seeing God in everyone, and being loving and compassionate, can a Sadhak (spiritual aspirant) grow."

A devotee: "Amma, I have given up many things for the sake of God, but I can't find peace."
Mother: "Son, all of us talk about the sacrifices we have made. But what do we really have that we can give up? What do we have that is our own? What we consider ours today will not be ours tomorrow. Everything belongs to God. Only through His grace are we able to enjoy things. If there is anything that is our own, it is our likes and dislikes; these are what we need to renounce. Even though we renounce many things now, we don't give up our attachment to those things. That is the reason for our sorrow. True renunciation happens only when we are convinced in our hearts that family, wealth, position, or fame will not give any lasting peace. What does the Gita teach? Isn't it to act without attachment?"

THE DANGER OF WEALTH

Mother started telling a story. "Once there was a rich man. One day some of his friends came to see him. They saw a servant outside the house and asked him where his master was. After searching inside, the servant came back and told them that his master was counting pebbles. 'Such a rich man counting pebbles?' wondered the guests among themselves.

"When the rich man appeared a little later, they asked him about this. He replied, I was counting money. Is my servant such a fool as to think I was counting pebbles? anyway, I am sorry about the confusion/ He severely scolded the servant after his friends had left.

A few days later another friend came to see the rich man. He asked the servant to find his master. After looking inside, the servant reported, 'He is loving his enemy.' The rich man was in fact counting his money and putting it away in his safe. Feeling that the servant had deliberately insulted him, he was enraged by the impudence. He beat up the servant and fired him. As the servant was leaving, the rich man gave him a doll and said. If you see anyone who is more foolish than yourself, give him this doll!' The servant departed silently.

"A few months went by. One night the rich man's house was robbed. The robbers took all the man's wealth. When he tried to stop them, they threw him down from the upper floor of the house, and escaped with everything. The next morning, the man's relatives found him lying on the ground in front of the house. He was unable to get up. Many different treatments were tried, but his health couldn't be restored. All his wealth was gone, and because of this, his wife and children also left him. He was in pain, and there was no one to look after him. He did not have any food at home, so he ate whatever his neighbours gave him.

"His old servant heard about his troubles and came to see him. He had the old doll with him. As soon as he arrived, he offered the doll to his master. His master realized his own folly and asked him. Why are you pouring salt into my wounds?'

"The servant replied: 'At least now you must have understood the meaning of what I said. Is the money you amassed worth as much as even a pebble to you now? Didn't your wealth in fact

turn out to be your enemy? Your wealth is what brought you to this state. Didn't you lose everything because of your wealth? Who is more foolish than you who made that wealth the object of your love? Those who loved you until now, really loved your money, not you. When your money was gone, you were as good as dead in their eyes. No one loves you now. Realize now at least that God is your only lasting friend. Call for his help!'

"The servant began nursing his master with great love. The rich man was filled with remorse. 'I don't know what I am going to do. My life has been useless until now. I thought that my wife and children and my wealth would be with me forever, and I lived for them. I didn't remember God even for a moment. But now everything is gone. Those who bowed their heads before me with respect no longer even glance at me. Instead, they spit at me in contempt.'

"The servant consoled him, 'Don't think that you have no one to look after you. God is with you.' He stayed with his old master and nursed him."

Mother stopped. A man who was sitting at the back of the group of devotees started weeping loudly. This was his first visit to Mother. He was crying bitterly, unable to control his grief. Mother called him close to Her and consoled him.

Still sobbing, the man said, "Amma, you just told my own story. All my money is gone. My wife and children hate me. My only solace is my old servant."

Wiping his tears, Mother said, "What is gone is gone, my son. Don't grieve over it. Only God lasts forever. Everything else will be gone today or tomorrow. It is enough if you live with that thought in your mind. Don't worry."

Mother asked Br. Balu"* to sing the song, 'Manase nin svantamayi..'

He sang:

Remember O mind this supreme truth:
Nobody is your own!

Because of doing meaningless actions,
You are wandering in the ocean of this world.

Even though people honor you,
Calling you, "Lord, Lord,"
It will be only for a short time.

Your body, which has been honored for so long.
Must be cast off when life departs.

The sweetheart for whom you have been struggling
All this time, not even caring for your life,
Even she will be frightened by your dead body
And will not accompany you.Now "
Trapped in the subtle snare of Maya as you are.
Do not forget the sacred name
Of the Divine Mother.

God will attract devotion-soaked souls
Like a magnet attracts iron.
Position prestige and wealth are impermanent
The only Reality is the Universal Mother.

Renouncing all desires
Let us dance in that bliss
Singing the name of Mother Kali.

Wednesday, June 19, 1985

MOTHER OF THE UNIVERSE

A young man with long hair and a beard came to the ashram. He approached a brahmachari and introduced himself as a reporter from a newspaper. "We have heard several good and bad things about Mother," he said. "I have come to find out what is really going on in this ashram. I talked to one or two residents. But there is one thing I don't understand at all."

Br: "What is that?"

Reporter: "How can educated people like you believe blindly in a human God?"

Br: "What do you mean by God? Do you mean a being with four arms, wearing a crown, sitting in a heaven beyond the sky?"

Reporter: "No. Everyone has their own concept of God. Generally, we imagine God as the embodiment of all the qualities that we consider sublime."

Br: "Then what is wrong in worshipping, as divine, an individual in whom we see all those divine qualities? If we don't accept that, we are saying that God is limited to the images that man sculpts out of stone, installs in a temple, and worships.

"The spiritual texts of India declare that a human being, an individual soul (Jivatman), is really not different from God, and that he understands his divinity when his ego (the sense that he is limited) is destroyed through constant practice. If the all-pervading Supreme Absolute can manifest through a temple deity, why can't it shine through an individual?"

The reporter had no answer.

The brahmachari continued: "In Mother we see all the qualities that the scriptures attribute to God, such as love, compassion, selflessness, forgiveness, and equal treatment of all. Because of this, some of us see Her as the Mother of the Universe. Others see Her as the loving Mother who was with us through countless lives. Some others consider Her as the guru who awakens the knowledge of the Self She Herself does not claim to be God or guru or to be anything at all. If you want fish from the ocean you get fish, but if you want pearls, you can get them too. Similarly, there is everything in Mother. If we put forth the effort, we can get what we want.

"The message of the Upanishads is that each of us is the essence of the Supreme Absolute. Weren't Rama, Krishna and Buddha all on this earth in human form at one time? If we can worship them, why can't we worship someone who shows all of their infinite, glorious qualities while She is in human form, and in our midst?"

Reporter: "Isn't it enough to think of Her as a guru? Why turn Her into God?"

Br: "That's fine. Yet the scriptures say that the guru is none other than God in human form. In a way, our tradition places the guru even higher than God."

By this time. Mother had arrived in the hut and started giving darshan to the devotees. The brahmachari invited the reporter to go up to Her, "Let's go in. You can put your questions directly to Mother."

Taking a seat near Mother, the reporter watched with wonder as the devotees approached Mother one by one, and She caressed and consoled each person with overflowing love. When the reporter was introduced to Her, Mother laughed.

Mother: "Amma doesn't read newspapers or anything, my son. Most of the children here don't even see a paper."

Reporter: "I was asking a brahmachari here whether Amma was God."

Mother: "She is just a crazy woman! All these people call Her 'Amma' (Mother), and so She calls them Her children."

Most of the time, Mother hides Her true self as She talks. Only someone who has acquired a measure of spiritual insight can appreciate even a little of Her innate nature. Many people picture a guru as someone who sits on a splendid throne, with a smile, always being served by his disciples, and showering blessings on all. Those who come to the ashram, however, will have to

give up this idea. Someone who sees Mother for the first time will find in Her a person more normal than most normal people. She can be seen cleaning the front yard, cutting vegetables, cooking, showing the devotees to their rooms, or carrying a load of sand. Nonetheless, for someone who knows what the scriptures say, it is easy to recognize the true Mother. Her humility clearly declares Her greatness.

Once a brahmachari asked Mother, "With the attainment of even the slightest siddhi most individuals will go around pretending to be Brahman, and accept many disciples. And people put their trust in them. When this is happening everywhere, why does Amma deceive Her children, saying She is nothing?"

Mother gave the following answer: "The brahmacharis living here today are meant to go out into the world tomorrow. They are to become role models for the world. Here they learn from Amma s every word and action. If there is even a trace of ego in Her words and actions, it will become tenfold in each of you. You will think, 'If Amma can do that, why can't I?' And that will harm the world.

"Do you children know how hard it is for Amma to stay at your level? A father tries hard to walk with his little baby, taking tiny steps. He does not do it for his own sake, but for the child's. Only if he takes small steps, can the child keep up with him. This role that Amma plays is not for Her, but for all of you. It is for the sake of your growth.

"When a child has jaundice, a loving mother will avoid cooking hot and salty dishes. She will hide all such foods, because the child may eat them if it finds them. Then it may get a fever and could even die. For the sake of the child, the mother also eats bland food. Even though she is not sick, she renounces her own taste. In the same way, all of Amma's words and actions are for the good of all of you. At every step. She thinks of your growth. Only if the doctor is a non-smoker, will the patient accept his instruction to give up smoking. Only if the doctor doesn't drink, will the patient also be inspired to give up drinking. Amma does nothing for Herself; everything is for the world. Everything is meant to help you advance."

The reporter asked Mother, "Amma, aren't you guiding the people here as their guru?"

Mother: "That depends on each person's attitude. Amma didn't have a guru, nor has She taken anyone on as a disciple. Amma only says that everything works according to the will of the Divine Mother."

Reporter: "I have a friend who is a great devotee of J. Krishnamurti."

Mother: "Many children have come here who are his devotees. Western children in particular like him."

Reporter: "Krishnamurti doesn't take any disciples. No one resides with him. We can go and see him, and we can talk to him. It is believed that we get what we want just from the conversation. His very presence is an inspiration. He is very jolly, and there is no aura of a guru around him."

Mother: "But, his very statement that you don't need a guru is a teaching, isn't it? And when someone is near him listening, don't we then have a guru and a disciple?"

Reporter: "He doesn't give advice or instructions."

Mother: "But what about his speeches, son?"

Reporter: "They are just like conversations, very light in nature."

Mother: "No guru insists that others should obey him or live according to his words. But every word of a guru is a form of advice. His life itself is his teaching. We listen to Krishnamurti's words, and when we follow those words, we come to know our real essence, right? That readiness to follow is nothing but discipleship. It nurtures humility and good conduct in us. Usually, only the children who grow up following their parents' advice become good adults.

"Obeying our parents instils a sense of duty and right conduct in us. Amma is not saying that Krishnamurti's method is wrong. He has read many books. He has gone to many wise people and learned much from them. Furthermore, he has practiced many methods. Only then did he reach the plane he is on, for he understood that everything is within himself. But son, you haven't reached that state.

"Today, our attention is mainly on external things. We hardly ever look inward. When children are in school, they are mostly interested in playing. They study mainly out of fear of their parents. But when they begin to have an aim‚€” to graduate with high marks, to become an

engineer, and so forth if they start studying without any prodding. Even though we have a spiritual goal, the mind slips away from it due to the pressure of our vasanas (latent tendencies). To control such a mind, a satguru (a Self-realized master) is essential. But after a certain stage, no help is needed. The guru within is then awakened.

"The hymn that we once memorized may be forgotten in time, but if someone reminds us of the opening line, we will be able to recite the whole song. Similarly, all wisdom is within us. The guru reminds us of this; he awakens what is dormant.

"There is a guru implied even in the statement that one doesn't need a guru. After all, someone had to tell us that we didn't need a guru. A guru is one who removes our ignorance. If one hasn't achieved a certain purity of mind, it is essential to spend some time under the guidance of a guru. Even if you have an innate talent in music, only after you practice under a competent teacher are you able to display that talent fully.

"Ordinary gurus can only explain spiritual principles. But a satguru, who has realized the Self, imparts part of his spiritual power to the disciples. This enables the disciple to reach the goal more rapidly. Just as the tortoise makes the eggs hatch by the power of its thoughts, the satguru's thoughts awaken the spiritual power in the disciple.

"Satsang and spiritual books have the power to turn our minds towards good thoughts. That alone, however, will not enable us to go forward with steady steps. Ordinary physicians will examine the patient and prescribe medicines. But if an operation is required, one has to see a surgeon. Likewise, to rid our minds of all the dirt, and to progress towards the ultimate goal, we have to take refuge in a guru."

Reporter: "Don't the scriptures say that everything is within us? Then what is the need for all that sadhana?"

Mother: "Although everything is within us, it is useless if we don't actually experience it. For that, sadhana is absolutely necessary. The rishis who gave us the mahavakyas (great sayings) such as I am Brahman,' and Thou art That,' were individuals who had reached that plane of experience. Their way of life was very different from ours. They viewed all living creatures as being equal; they loved and served all beings without distinction. In their eyes, nothing in the universe was separate from themselves. While they had the qualities of God, we have the qualities of a fly. A fly lives in dirt and excreta. Similarly, our minds can see only mistakes and defects in others. This has to change. We have to be able to see the good in everything. Until we realize the Truth, through sadhana and contemplation, there is no sense in saying that everything is already within us.

"People who have studied the scriptures and Vedanta for forty or fifty years come here. Even they say they have no peace of mind. We can't get light by hanging a picture of a lamp on the wall. If we need to see something, we have to turn the real light on. Learning from books and giving speeches is not enough. To experience the Truth, one has to do sadhana, and discover the real I. For this, a guru's help is essential."

Reporter: "Is that the help Amma is giving here?"

Mother: "Amma doesn't do anything Herself. The Paramatman makes Her do everything! These people need Amma now; the seeker needs the guru. Why? Because at this stage their minds are not strong enough. Little children like to poke their hands into the fire. Their mother will tell them, 'Don't touch it, my son, it will burn your hand!' Someone has to say that to the child to turn it away from the fire. That is all Amma is doing. At some point, we need someone to call attention to our errors."

Reporter: "Isn't it slavery when one follows the guru blindly?"

Mother: "My son, to know the Truth, we have to get rid of the sense of I. It is hard to achieve this just by doing sadhana on one's own. To eliminate the ego, it is essential to do spiritual practice under the guidance of a guru. When we bow down before the guru, we are not bowing to that individual, but to the ideal in him. We do it so that we may also attain to his level.

"We can rise only through humility. The seed contains the tree within it, but if it is content to lie in a storeroom somewhere, it will be eaten by mice. Only by going under the soil will its true form emerge. When you push the button down, the umbrella unfolds; it is then able to protect one from the rain.

"Because we respected and obeyed our parents, elders, and teachers, we grew and gained knowledge. They nurtured good qualities and good behaviour in us. In the same way, obedience to the guru elevates the disciple to a more expansive, higher plane.

"It is to become the King of kings later, that the disciple takes on the role of a servant now. We put a fence around a little mango tree; we nurture it and raise it, so we can get the sweet fruit later. The disciple shows reverence to the guru and obeys him, in order to reach the Truth that the guru represents.

"When we board a plane, they ask us to fasten our seat belts, not to show off their power over us, but for our own safety. In the same way, the guru asks the disciple to obey certain rules, and to practice restraint, only to elevate him. He does this only to protect the disciple from the dangers that may befall him. The guru knows that the disciple's ego-driven impulses will cause danger to him and to others. The road is for the use of vehicles; but if you drive your car any way you please, accidents are sure to happen.

That is why we are asked to obey the rules of the road. Don't we obey the policeman who directs the traffic at intersections? We prevent many accidents by doing so.

"When our sense of I and mine' are about to destroy us, we are saved by following the satguru's advice. He gives us the training needed to avoid such circumstances later. The very nearness to the guru gives us strength.

"The guru is the embodiment of selflessness. We are able to learn what truth, dharma (righteousness), renunciation, and love mean because the guru lives in those qualities. The guru is the very life of those qualities. By obeying and emulating him, those qualities take root in us. Obedience to the guru is not slavery. The guru's aim is only the safety of the disciple. He truly shows us the path. A true guru will never see his disciple as his slave. He is filled with love for the disciple. He wants to see the disciple succeed, even if it means hardship for himself. The true guru is indeed like a mother."

Mother's words sank deep into the listeners' minds, uprooting doubts and planting the seeds of faith. The reporter took leave with the satisfaction of having imbibed much that he had not known before.

Saturday, June 22, 1985

MEDITATION

Mother and the brahmacharis were sitting in the meditation room. Some householder devotees were also sitting nearby. Not wasting the chance to be with Mother this morning, a newly arrived brahmachari wanted to know more about meditation.

Br: "Amma, what is meant by meditation?"

Mother: "Let us say we are going to make payasam (rice pudding). If someone asks us why we are pouring water into the pot, we say it is for payasam. But we are just taking water to be heated. Similarly, when we get the rice and the jaggery (unrefined brown sugar), we say these things are for payasam. In fact, the payasam is still to come. In the same way, when we sit with our eyes closed, we say we are meditating. Truly speaking, it is not meditation; it is a practice to reach the state of true meditation. True meditation is a state of the mind, an experience. It cannot be described in words.

"Don't we talk about 'sadhakam in connection with singing? It just means practicing to sing. To sing well, one has to practice repeatedly and attain proficiency. In the same way, on the spiritual path sadhana is practice, and meditation is the state you reach as a result of it.

"Constant thought directed to God is meditation, like the flow of a river. You reach the state of meditation only by achieving true one-pointedness. In the beginning, you should purify the mind, make it one-pointed and dissolve it through japa and devotional singing; then practice meditation.

"Without feeling love for God within, we cannot fasten our minds on Him. Once someone has that love, his mind will not stray again towards worldly things. To him, worldly pleasures are like dog

excreta. Little babies will pick up mud and dirt and put it in their mouths. Will they be tempted to do so, even a little bit, once they grow up and develop some discrimination?"

THE SORROWS OF WORLDLY LIFE

A brahmachari brought some letters that had just arrived, and Mother started reading them. As She was reading. She said to the devotees: "Just by reading these, one can see everything about life. Most of these letters are tales of suffering."

Br: "Are there no letters asking questions on spiritual matters?"

Mother: "Yes, but most letters tell stories of sorrow. Like the letter that came the other day from a daughter. Her husband comes home drunk every day and beats her up. One day their two-year-old child came between them. To someone who is totally drunk, what is the difference between a child and an adult? Just one kick and the baby's leg was broken. The leg is now in a cast. Even after this, the husband still drinks just as much as before. The wife has to take care of the baby and do everything else at home. She wrote for Amma's blessings so that her husband would stop drinking."

A devotee: "Amma, do you read all these letters yourself? There is a big bundle just from today's mail."

Mother: "When Amma thinks of their tears, how can She not read them all? She will write replies to some of them Herself If there are a lot of letters, She will explain to someone what to write. It is hard to read and reply to all of them. Some letters fill ten or twelve sheets. Amma doesn't even get time to read them all. She will read letters almost until daybreak. She will have a letter in Her hand while She is eating something. Often Amma dictates a reply while taking a bath." She gave the letters to a brahmachari, saying, "Put all these letters in Amma's room, son. Amma will read them later."

DETAILS OF SADHANA

Mother asked a newly arrived brahmachari, "Are you reading any books these days, son?"

Br: "Yes, Amma. But most books say the same thing. And much of it is repeated in many places throughout the same book."

Mother: "Son, there is only one thing to be said. What is everlasting, what is transitory? What is good, what is bad? How can one realize the eternal? The Gita and the Puranas are all trying to explain these same things. The key principles are explained again and again. That is to show how important they are. If people hear them over and over again, the principles will stay in their minds. There are some apparent differences among the books, that's all. While the Ramayana talks about the battle between Rama and Ravana, the Mahabharata talks about the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The basic principle is the same. How can one hold on to the principles and move forward in the various situations that life brings? That is what all the mahatmas and all the books are trying to teach."

Another brahmachari: "Amma, my body feels very weak these days. It started after I began taking yoga lessons."

Mother: "Son, when you start practicing yoga postures, you will feel fatigue for the first few months. You should eat well. Once the body gets used to the practice, you will feel normal again. Then your eating habits should also go back to normal." Mother laughed.

"Don't let me catch you stuffing yourself, saying, 'Amma has told me to eat a lot...'"

Everybody laughed.

Mother continued, "Sadhaks should be very careful about their eating habits. It is better not to eat anything in the morning. You should immerse yourself in meditation until about eleven A.M. The tamasic quality increases if you eat too much, and your mind will be filled with all the bad

tendencies. If you do eat something in the morning, it should be very light. The mind should be concentrating on meditation."

A young man was sitting near the door of the meditation room, listening keenly to Mother's words. An educated man with a master's degree, he had been living in Rishikesh for the last four years. The previous month, while visiting a friend in Delhi, he had heard about Mother. He had arrived at the ashram two days earlier to see Mother.

Young Man: "Amma, I have been doing sadhana for the last few years. So far, it has been disappointing. I lose my strength when I remember that I have not been able to realize God so far."

Mother: "Son, do you know what kind of detachment is needed to attain God-realization? Imagine that you are sleeping soundly at home. Suddenly you wake up feeling very hot. You find that there is a fire raging all around you. Wouldn't you get into a frenzy at that moment, trying to escape from the fire? Think of the urgency with which you would cry for help, seeing death in front of you. You have to cry with that same urgency to get the vision of God. Think of how someone who falls into deep water, and cannot swim, would struggle for breath. That's how much you have to struggle to merge in the Supreme Absolute. You should constantly feel the grief of not having attained the vision of God. At every moment, your heart should ache for it."

Mother stopped for a moment and continued; '*You won't get the vision of God just by living in the ashram. You need to do sadhana with extreme detachment. You need to feel, I don't want anything but God.' To someone who has a fever, even sweet things will taste bitter. Similarly, if you have the fever of love for God, your mind will not go towards anything else. Your eyes will not want to see anything but the form of God. Your ears will long to hear the divine name; all other sounds will irritate and burn your ears. Your mind will be struggling like a fish out of water until you reach God!" Mother closed Her eyes and was immersed in meditation. Everyone sat watching Her intently.

Several minutes later, Mother got up and walked along the outside wall of the meditation room. The tank for storing drinking water was on the south side, just two feet away from the wall of the meditation room, thus leaving a narrow passage. The water from this tank was pumped to another tank at a higher level, from which it was distributed throughout the ashram.

Mother looked inside the tank. Before proceeding to the hut to give darshan to the people who were waiting there. She told the brahmacharis, "There is moss building up inside this tank, children. It should be cleaned."

Dusk had fallen. Immersed in a divine mood. Mother was sitting on the cot in Her room singing a bhajan. The flames in the oil lamps lit at dusk were absolutely still, as if immersed in Her song, Agamanta porule jaganmayi.

O Essence of the Vedas,
Who pervades the universe
Who is filled with wisdom
Does anyone know you? O blissful Self
Eternal Being, devoid of sorrow,
O primal supreme Power, Protect me!
You dwell in all hearts, knowing all.
Eager to offer the bliss of liberation.
Unseen by the wicked, but always shining
In the meditation of the virtuous.
You shine forth

In the form of eternal Truth.
O Devi, eternal One,
Show me the path of salvation;
Shine in me, a dullard among mankind.

Clearly I tell You, O Mother Deign to enter and shine in my heart. Allow me to praise Your story And liberate me from this Maya.

On the wall behind Mother there was a picture of Devi Saraswati with Her vina. Did Devi's fingers start playing the vina when Mother began to sing? Before the echo of Her song had died down, Mother picked up the picture and kissed Devi's image, again and again. She held the picture against Her heart and sat still for a while.

She sat in the same pose without the slightest movement. As the evening bhajan started in the kalari. She gently put the picture down on the bed. Two wet streams of tears were visible on the picture. Getting up, She slowly began pacing back and forth, still immersed in Her divine mood.

The bhajans ended, and the arati came to a close. Mother went outside and walked in the small courtyard in front of the meditation room.

ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS

Some devotees who were standing at a distance approached Mother. She led them to the kalari and sat down.

A devotee: "Amma, I have a question about something you said to the brahmacharis this morning."

Mother: "What is it, son?"

Devotee: "Amma said that worldly life is equal to dog excreta. Should one view worldly life that badly?"

Mother (laughing): "Wasn't Amma talking to the brahmacharis then? They have to get that kind of detachment to persist on the spiritual path. A brahmachari who has a firm sense of the goal will not feel attracted to worldly life at all. Amma has to give him a low view of worldly life, so that he gets the strength to proceed to his goal. Otherwise, he will get trapped by physical pleasures and lose his strength.

"A soldier gets the training required for his work in the army, while a policeman is trained in a different way for his duties as a police officer. Similarly, the instructions needed for a brahmachari and a householder are different. Although the goal is the same for both, there is a difference in the level of intensity. The brahmachari has already renounced all his relations and has dedicated himself totally to this path. He chants a mantra of detachment at every step.

"Amma would never say that grihasthashrama is inferior. Weren't all the ancient rishis householders? Didn't Rama and Krishna embrace the life of a householder? But someone who has taken the vow of brahmacharya has to view worldly life as equal to dog excreta. Then he will be able to maintain the level of detachment needed to stay on the path.

"Thus a brahmachari should be given the advice needed for complete detachment. Amma is very happy to see the awakening of a sense of detachment in the householders among Her children. They only need to guard that flame from being extinguished, then they can eventually reach the goal. Amma will not ask anyone to give up everything and become a sannyasi before he acquires a total sense of detachment.

"The path that Amma is prescribing is not one in which you go to the Himalayas and sit with your eyes closed thinking only of moksha (liberation). One has to learn to overcome adverse situations. The jackal thinks, as it sits in the jungle, that it won't howl the next time it sees a dog. Yet, as soon as it happens to see a dog, it cannot help but howl out of sheer habit. A person of real courage is one who has no attachment or sense of possession, even while living in the midst of worldly experiences. The real grihasthasrami should be like that.

"Just as the flower falls away as the fruit takes shape, worldly desires will disappear when detachment ripens. No desire can bind such a person afterwards, whether he lives at home or in the forest. One who has established God-realization as his goal will not attach any importance to anything else. He has already understood that nothing physical is permanent and that real bliss is within."

Devotee: "How can we bring the mind back when it goes in search of external pleasures?"

Mother: "The camel eats thorny bushes when it is hungry. Its mouth will bleed because of the thorns. Suppose you eat only hot peppers when you are hungry, because you like peppers. Your mouth will burn, and your stomach too. You wanted to satisfy your hunger, but now you have

to bear the pain. In the same way, if one depends on physical things for one's happiness, there will be sorrow in the end.

"Take the musk deer, as an example. However long it searches for the source of the fragrance of musk, it won't find it, because the fragrance comes from within itself. Bliss lies not in external things; it exists within ourselves. Once we contemplate this, and get enough detachment, the mind will stop running after external pleasures.

"When we know the juice is inside the fruit, we peel the fruit and throw the peel away. That is the attitude a sadhak must have. Then the mind will not go outwards. We will be able to appreciate the essence of everything."

Devotee: "Amma, isn't it possible to enjoy spiritual bliss while living a worldly life?"

Mother: "How can you fully experience spiritual bliss without fixing the mind totally on God? If you mix payasam with many other dishes, can you fully enjoy its taste?

"Lord Vishnu asked Sanaka and the other sages several times to get married. But they replied, 'Every moment that we live in matrimony will be spent without remembering you. We need only you, Lord! Nothing else.'

"Since nothing is separate from God, some people argue that worldly life must be all right. It is all right if one can remember God in all circumstances. But can we do that? What do we normally do when we eat something sweet, enjoy the sweet taste or remember God? If you can think of nothing but God even at that time, then there is no problem; you can follow that path."

Devotee: "Don't our scriptures prescribe four stages in life brahmacharya, grihasthashrama, vanaprastha, and sannyasa? After leading the life of a grihastha (householder), one goes into vanaprastha when one begins to have detachment. One becomes a sannyasi when one has complete detachment. All bonds are severed and one surrenders oneself completely to God. That is indeed the goal of life."

Another devotee: "It is also said that one can go from brahmacharya directly to sannyasa, if one has complete detachment."

Mother (laughing): "Sure, but the parents don't allow it, that's all. Some of the children at the ashram had to overcome serious opposition in order to remain here."

Devotee: "Amma, do we deserve realization at all? We are so sorry to be trapped in this worldly life!"

Mother: "Don*t think like that, my dear children! Think that this is meant to remove all the obstacles on the path to God. If we see something blocking the path when we set out on a trip, we will remove it and then proceed. If not, it will always lie there as an obstacle. Worldly life allows us to uproot the desire and anger that is present in us. Amma sometimes recommends marriage for those children in whom the vasanas are very strong. If the vasanas are suppressed, they will explode sooner or later. We need to transcend them. Family life provides the circumstances for that.

"The mind should be given strength through contemplation. If a toddler falls down as it tries to walk, it should get up and continue to walk. If it just lies there, it will never make any progress. Family life is not meant to take us away from God, but to bring us closer to Him. Use it for that purpose, children, without worrying unnecessarily

"Family life allows us to conquer our vasanas. Don't drown in the vasanas; understand what they are and go beyond them. We will reach our goal only if we become completely detached from the vasanas. We feel satisfied after enjoying our fill of payasam, but a little later, we want twice as much. Once we understand the true nature of this yearning, the mind will not go after it. Would anyone touch the payasam if a lizard fell into it?

"When the vasanas pull us towards them, the mind will resist if it knows that they are not the source of real joy, and that they will only bring us sorrow. But this knowledge has to be firmly planted in the mind and intellect. Don't let your lives go to waste, children, by being slaves to your minds! Don't barter away a priceless jewel for a piece of candy. Our minds will quiet down if we stop giving as much importance to sensory pleasures as we do now.

"Don't worry if you don't have the strength to do so, right away. Sit in solitude for a little while every day, and reflect on this, assuming the attitude of a witness. Make it a regular habit.

You will certainly get the strength you need. It's no use just sitting somewhere and crying that you are too weak. Find the strength you need. Then you will be able to stand up to any challenge, without faltering. Children, don't shed tears thinking that you are undeserving. That will only rob you of your strength.

"Son, don't regret that you couldn't become a brahmachari, or that you can't be with Amma all the time. You children are all like the leaves on a plant. Some leaves are close to the flower, and others are far away from it, but all the leaves belong to the same plant. Likewise, all are Amma's children; don't doubt that one bit. Don't feel sorry that you can't enjoy Amma's physical presence by not being with Her. You can also reach the ultimate goal someday."

Devotee: "Still, haven't our lives been wasted by being trapped by all these worldly desires?"

Mother: "Why should you feel sorry about the past? Go forward with faith.

"Once there was a woodcutter. He was very poor. He would go to the forest every day, cut wood, make charcoal from it, and bring it to a store that sold it as fuel. He obtained only a very small income from this, not at all enough to fill his stomach. For a house he had just an old, rotting, leaky hut. Because his health did not allow him to work any harder, he was always in despair. One day the king happened to pass through the village. He heard about the sad plight of the poor woodcutter. The king told him, Trom now on, you don't have to struggle. I am giving you a sandalwood forest. You can live comfortably with the income from it.'

"The next day, the woodcutter went to work as usual. Since he now had his own forest, he didn't have to search for trees to cut. He cut some sandalwood, made charcoal, and brought it to the fuel store as usual. He earned no more than he had before.

"After a few years, the king came to the village again. He asked for the man to whom he had given the sandalwood forest. The king expected him to be a rich man by now. He was astonished when he saw the woodcutter. If anything, the man was poorer than before. No happiness shone on his face, and he had even forgotten how to laugh. The king asked him in dismay. What happened to you? What did you do with the forest I gave you?' 'I cut the trees and sold them as charcoal,' the man said. The king couldn't believe that the man had given away those precious trees for some paltry sum of money. 'Are there any trees left?' he asked. 'Yes, there is one,' said the man. The king replied, 'Oh, you fool! What I gave you was a forest full of sandalwood trees. They were not meant to be burnt as fuel! All right, at least there is one tree left. Cut it and sell it without turning it into charcoal. From that, you will get enough to live on for the rest of your life.' Following the king's advice, the woodcutter was able to live comfortably from then on.

"Children, you have the desire to know God. That is enough. Your lives will be fulfilled. It is enough if you lead a proper life in the future."

A woman came up to Mother with two little children and prostrated. Putting her head on Mother's lap, she began to cry bitterly as she told the story of her grief.

Her husband had started a business with money borrowed at an exorbitant interest rate. The business failed. They sold their land and pawned the woman's jewellery to pay back the debt. They could not reclaim the jewellery in time, so it was auctioned off. Due to pressure from the creditors, they sold their house and rented another place. Now there was no money to pay the rent. The woman had set out with her children with the idea of committing suicide, but then she heard about Mother from a friend and came to see Her.

She said through her tears, "Amma, do you know what a comfortable life we had? My husband has ruined everything. I cannot live there any longer. There isn't even any money for the rent. All my relatives are doing well. How can I show them my face? So I decided to end this life and my children's too."

Mother: "Daughter, you don't have to die because of this. Is death in our hands, anyway? And, what right do you have to take the lives of your children?

"Where there is fire, there is also smoke, my child. Where there is desire, there is also sorrow. Just like the sun and its heat. You wanted a grand life, so you started a big business. That is what caused your grief. If you had learned to be satisfied with what you had, there wouldn't be

any problem now. Life is full of happiness and sorrow. There is no life that is all happiness, or all sorrow.

"There is a time for everything. At certain times in our lives, everything we start ends in failure. There's no use collapsing when that happens. Hold on tightly to God. He is our sole refuge. He will not fail to show us a way out. At least you have your health; you can work for a living. God will arrange that. No need to sit in a corner and cry; that will only waste your time and ruin your health. Don't grieve over what is gone, my daughter! Remembering what is past and mourning about it is like cuddling a dead body.

"The past will never come back to us. We don't know anything about the future, either. Instead of wasting your time and ruining your health brooding about the past and the future, you should strengthen the present. You are now ruining the present by dwelling constantly on the past and the future. Only the Paramatman knows about all three past, present, and future. Therefore, you should surrender all three to Him and go forward, always remembering Him. Then there will always be a smile on your face".

"Picture someone eating ice cream. As he eats, he thinks, 'In the restaurant I went to yesterday, all the food was uncovered. Could some cockroach or lizard have fallen in? Was my headache this morning caused by eating that food? This morning, my son asked for new clothes again. How can I buy him anything? I don't have the money. I have been dreaming for so long about a better house. But what I earn is not enough. Things would improve if I could only find a better job!' By this time, all the ice cream is gone. Immersed in his thoughts, the man didn't even experience its taste. The past was disturbing his mind, and the future was also worrying him; so he wasted a pleasant occasion in the present. If, instead, he had forgotten about the past and the future, and had paid attention to the present moment, he could have at least enjoyed the flavor of the ice cream. Therefore, taste every moment as you go forward, children. Surrender everything to God, or greet all circumstances with a smile. Forget the past and the future, and deal with what is happening in this moment, with alertness.

"If you fall, get up and go forward with enthusiasm. Consider that the fall was meant to make you more alert. See the past as a cancelled check. There is no point in brooding over it. It is useless to just sit there and worry about your wounds; you have to apply medicine to the wounds as soon as possible.

"Daughter, no one brings anything into this world or takes anything away. We acquire things here and then we lose them. That is all. Once we recognize that this is the nature of things, we will not lose our strength worrying about them. Peace of mind is real wealth, daughter. That is the wealth we should find a way to guard.

"Stay here until your husband gets a job. Your children can stay here, too. Stop worrying!"

With Her hands. Mother wiped away the woman's tears and all her worries.

Another woman said, "Amma, I am very sad when I feel unable to connect my mind with God, since many bad thoughts come up and trouble me."

Mother: "Daughter, don't fret about the bad thoughts. The mind is just a collection of thoughts. Think that the bad thoughts come up because it is time for them to disappear. But be careful not to identify with them.

"When we travel in a bus, we see so many nice things on the way, nice houses, pretty flowers, beautiful gardens, and so on. But we don't form any bonds with them; we just let them pass by because they are not our destination. We have to learn to see the thoughts that pass through our minds in the same way. Watch them, but don't relate to them. Don't cling to them. We can stand on the bank and watch the river flow. The river is interesting to watch, but if we jump in, we will soon lose our strength. Try to develop the ability to stand back as a witness, as thoughts pass through your mind. That will make your mind strong."

A woman who had been listening to Mother's words, said, "Amma, once we get entangled in the web of family Hfe, it is difficult to break lose, however much we try!"

Mother: "A bird sits on the dry twig of a tree and eats a piece of fruit it has found somewhere. It knows that the twig may break at any moment; so it is very alert as it sits on the twig. You should understand that this world is like that. Everything may be lost at any moment.

You should remember that, children. Be sure to hold on to the truth that only God is everlasting. Then there will be no reason for sorrow.

"If we are aware that there are fireworks going on around us, the next loud bang won't startle us and make us lose our balance. In the same way, if we understand the true nature of this world, we won't lose our equilibrium. We should learn to do everything as a duty assigned to us, and proceed without identifying with anything.

"Look at a bank manager. Look at all the people who work under him. He has to pay attention to them, and he also has to deal with all the loan applicants who bring a lot of supporting documents. If the manager is charmed by the smiles and compliments of the applicants, and gives all of them loans without inspecting their documents carefully, he will end up in jail. He knows that some of these people have come to get the money from him by whatever means. He knows that the money in the bank is not his own, yet he doesn't just give it away to anyone who asks. He isn't annoyed with anyone, and he doesn't hesitate to give loans to those who are deserving. He simply does his duty properly, that's all; and then he has no reason to be sorry.

"We should all be like that. We should be able to do everything with sincerity and enthusiasm. We shouldn't be discouraged or become lazy, thinking that nothing will be with us in the end. We should do our work as a duty, with shraddha. There should be no aversion towards it. See everything as an aspect of the Paramatman. Everything is that same ultimate principle.

"Haven't you seen candies wrapped in papers of different colors ”red, white, blue and green? All are different on the outside. Children will fight for their favorite colors, I want blue,' I want red,' and so on. The child who wants red will not be happy if he is given a blue one. He will cry until he gets a red one. But when the wrappers are removed, all the candies taste the same. We are like those children. We don't think about the candy; we are fascinated by the different wrappers and fight over them. In reality, the principle that dwells in all living things is the same. Even though the outer shapes and colors may differ, the supreme principle does not change. We are unable to grasp this because we have lost our childlike innocence and our inner purity.

"Say that someone is angry with us or acts in a hostile manner. If we react to him with anger or punish him, it is like poking a wound he has on his hand and thus making it larger, instead of putting some medicine on it and healing it. The pus from his wound will fall on our body, and make us stink as well. His ego becomes stronger, while our ignorance deepens. On the other hand, if we forgive him, it is like applying medicine on his wounds; and it makes our own minds expansive. Therefore, children, live a life of love and forgiveness. All this may seem very difficult, but if you try, you will certainly succeed."

Devotee: "Amma, where can we find time for meditation and japa in the midst of all the responsibilities of family life?"

Mother: "Nothing is difficult for those who really want it. You have to have a sincere desire to do it. You should spend at least one day a week in solitude, performing sadhana. You may have responsibilities and work to do. Even then, one day should be set apart. Don't you take sick leave if you are not well, even if there is a lot of unfinished work? Don't you take a day off to attend the wedding of a relative? How much more important is this! So, at least one day a week, go to an ashram and do sadhana and seva. That day will train you to strengthen the love and cooperation in your family as well.

"When your children indulge in mischief, explain things to them lovingly. Childhood is the foundation of life. If we don't pay attention to our children and show them love and affection, they may go astray. Parents should remember to be especially loving towards their children when they are very young, just as you would water a tender, young plant. Once the children are grown and have found jobs, the parents should entrust them with the family responsibilities, and retire to an ashram life and do sadhana in solitude. Purify the mind through service. It is unwise to cling to your home and children until your last breath. When the children are grown up, the desire to see your grandchildren and to help with their upbringing will become strong. All living beings on earth manage to grow and survive, don't they? They are not waiting for help. Leave your children in God's hands. That is what loving parents should do. That is true love.

"Until now, we have toiled for 'my sake and for my children.' In this there is no difference between us and the animals. Then what is the fruit of this precious human life of ours? From now on, our work should be for 'Your sake.' Then the I will slowly disappear by itself. Our worries and sorrows will vanish as well.

"Once we board a train, why continue to carry our load and complain about how heavy it is? We can put it down. Similarly, learn to take refuge in the Supreme Being, totally surrendering everything.

"If once a week is not practical, at least two days a month should be spent in an ashram atmosphere, immersed in japa and meditation and doing service. Remembering God is the real foundation of life. In due course we can free ourselves from all bonds, just as a snake sheds its skin; and merge in God. Follow a regular discipline. Some people say the world around us is also Brahman, so why withdraw from it? Yes, everything is Brahman, but have we reached that stage? God cannot see wrong in anyone. He sees only the good in everything. When we get that same attitude, then there is some meaning in saying 'everything is Brahman.' If there is only one thing right among a thousand wrongs, God will see only that one thing.

"A guru had two disciples. He used to give one of them more responsibilities in the ashram. The second disciple did not like this, since he considered himself to be the best disciple in the ashram. He began to dislike the first disciple. One day he asked the guru, 'Why are you not entrusting me with any of the ashram matters? I can do these things better than he can.'

"The guru called both disciples and asked them to go out and learn about the nature of people. As the first disciple walked along, he saw a man giving candy and consoling a small child on the roadside. Upon inquiry, he came to know that the man was, in fact, a murderer. Still, the disciple was pleased at the good side of the man. As he walked on, he saw someone giving water to an old man who was lying on the wayside, weakened by hunger and thirst. The disciple came to know that the person who was doing this was a robber. He was glad that there was compassion even in the robber. Next, he saw a woman wiping the tears of another woman and soothing her. The kind woman was a prostitute. The disciple could not look down on the prostitute when he saw the compassion in her heart. He came back to the guru and described everything, giving special praise for the good actions he had seen.

"The second disciple also returned at this time. He reported that he had seen a man beating a child. Next he had seen someone rebuking a beggar. And further along, he had seen a nurse being very cross with a patient. These sights only generated hatred in the heart of the disciple towards the people he saw. The man who had beaten the child had a big heart. In fact, he fed and clothed many poor children and paid for their education. This one child had the habit of stealing things. Talking to him did not help and the man finally resorted to beating him, to make him see his mistake. But the disciple could not justify this. He thought to himself, 'Should anyone, however good-hearted, be allowed to beat a child? Bad fellow!'

"The second man he had encountered was one who gave generously to others. He saw a healthy man begging and was trying to persuade him to use his God-given health and work for a living. The disciple didn't approve of this either. He thought, 'However generous a person may be, what right does he have to berate someone? If he didn't want to give anything, he could just send the beggar away.'

"Lastly, the nurse the disciple saw was one who loved her patients very much. She nursed the patients day and night. This particular patient had the habit of removing his bandages. This delayed the healing of his wounds. The nurse was scolding him for this, out of love for him. Well, the disciple didn't like this either: The nurse must have applied some medicine that made his wounds sting; that is probably why the patient removed the bandages. And she is scolding him for that. Wicked woman!'

"After listening to the explanations given by both his disciples, the guru said, 'No one is completely bad in this world. However bad someone is said to be, there will be something good in him. One of you could see the good in a murderer, a robber, and a prostitute. If there is goodness in us, we will also see it in others. Those are the kind of eyes we need.'

"The guru then said to the second disciple, 'My son, you were seeing your own nature in others, You could see only bad things, even in those who had much goodness in them. The day your own nature changes, you will be able to see the goodness in everything.'

"At present, our mind is like that of the second disciple. Even if there are a thousand rights, we don't see them; we see the one mistake that mav he there. Hut (God sees only whatever is good in His children.) when we have that attitude, can we say that everything is Brahman, or that everything is God.

"There are people who ask, 'Isn't the guru within us? Isn't it enough to follow our own minds? Why should we take refuge in someone else?' It is true that the guru is within us, but that 'guru' is presently the slave ot our vasanas. Our mind is not under our control; it is being controlled by the vasanas. So it is dangerous to follow the mind.

"Amma will tell you the story of a man who approached many gurus. All of them talked only about humility, faith, and devotion. The man didn't like this. 'I don't want to be anyone's slave,' he decided. He sat on the side of the road, and said to himself, 'None of the gurus I have seen is fit to guide me properly.' While thinking this, he looked up and saw a camel grazing nearby, nodding its head. The man was surprised that the camel understood what he was thinking. 'This must be the guru I have been searching for,' he thought to himself. He went up to the camel and asked, 'Will you be my guru?' The camel nodded its head again. The man was happy.

"After this, he did nothing without first asking the camel guru. The camel agreed to everything he asked, by nodding its head. One day he asked the camel, I have seen a girl. May I love her?' The camel nodded. After a few days, he came back to the camel, and asked, 'Shall I marry her?' The camel guru gave its approval to this as well. A few more days passed. The next question was. Is it all right if I drink a little?' The camel nodded again. The man came home very drunk that day. Soon this became a habit. His wife didn't like it. He went to the guru and asked if it would be all right if he fought with his wife. Again, the guru agreed. Soon the man came back to ask, 'My wife does not like my drinking. Shall I kill her?' The camel nodded its head even on this occasion. The man hurried home and stabbed his wife, injuring her seriously. The police came and arrested him. He was given life imprisonment.

"Our mind is like this camel guru. There is no question of right or wrong. It approves of anything that pleases us. There is no thought of future consequences. If we depend on the mind, which is a slave of our vasanas, we will only experience eternal bondage. At present, our intellect doesn't have any discrimination, so the best course is to follow the advice of a real guru. Today we do wrong things, with the excuse that God is making us do them. It is not right for us to insist that the guru should agree to everything we do. Only one who follows the guru's instructions without question will be able to reach the goal. He is the true disciple.

"Just as the tortoise hatches its eggs by thinking about them, a thought from the guru is enough to take the disciple to the goal. A satguru is one who has realized the Truth. Following his advice will take us higher, even if it seems inconvenient to do so right now. Those 'gurus' who agree to all the wishes of the disciples are not real gurus. They know only how to nod their heads, like the camel. They don't think of the progress of the disciples."

A devotee: "Amma, don't the scriptures say, 'All is Brah-man ?

Mother: "But we have not reached that stage! Therefore, we have to act with discrimination. It is not wise to go near a rabid dog, declaring everything is Brahman. The friend who asks you to stay away from the dog is also Brahman. If you don't have the discrimination to decide on the right course of action in this case, your life will be ruined.

"As long as we have not experienced it, what is the use of saying 'everything is Brahman'? Think of the different objects made of cane. There is cane in the chair, in the table, and in the basket. But the cane also contains within it the chair, the table, and the basket. Similarly, there is gold in the ring, the bracelet, and the earrings; but we are mostly enamoured by the external shapes of these things. Those who are not fascinated by the form, see the gold within all of them. We have to develop that kind of vision. We have to grasp that everything contains the one ultimate truth, Brahman. Those who have reached that stage cannot do anything wrong. Those who just talk about Brahman, but have not experienced It, are the ones who commit mistakes.

''Advatta (non-duality) is the state in which there is only One. It is the state in which you spontaneously see everyone as being the same as your own Self. It is not something you talk about; it is a state to be experienced.

"Once a man borrowed money from several people and bought an island. There he built a palace for himself. To anyone who visited him, he would talk only about his palace and about his

own importance. One day a sannyasi came there for bhiksha (alms). Feeling that the sannyasi did not show him enough respect, the rich man was annoyed. He told the sannyasi, 'Do you know who owns this island, the palace and everything here? All this belongs to me. I control everything. No one shows me any respect!'

"The sannyasi listened patiently, and then asked, 'Does everything here belong to you?'

"Yes,' came the reply.

"Truly?'

"Tes, truly.'

"The sannyasi said. Whose money bought aU these things? Ask your conscience that question!'

"The rich man was abashed by this. He realized his mistake; that in truth, nothing there belonged to him. He fell at the feet of the sadhu.

"The knowledge' we have now has not been gained through sadhana. We have just read what others have written, and we sit around mouthing the words, I am Brahman.' We say 1 am Brahman,' but we do not show any compassion, humility, or forgiveness towards anyone. Such people have no right even to utter the word ' Brahman.'

"If you train a parrot, it will also say 'Brahman, Brahman.' But if a cat comes by, the parrot will only know how to cry in fear. It will die crying. Instead of just repeating the word 'Brahman,' we have to absorb that principle. We have to fix it in our minds through constant contemplation. That principle is the symbol of compassion and ex-pansiveness. It has to be experienced. Those who have experienced it don't have to keep saying, 'I am Brahman.' We can feel that quality just by going near them. Their smile will persist in all circumstances.

"Now the Brahman in us is like the tree within a seed. How will it sound if the seed claims, 'I am a tree?' The tree is in the seed, but the seed has to go under the soil, after which the sprout, and then the seedling has to grow up. When it becomes a tree, you can even chain an elephant to it; but if we don't protect the seed, it will be eaten by some bird. The supreme principle is indeed within us, but we have to bring it to the plane of experience through study and constant meditation.

"Once a young man approached a guru and requested to be taken on as a disciple. It was an ashram with many residents. The guru told the youth, 'Spiritual life is very hard. It is better if you go and come back at a later time.'

"The young man was very disappointed. Seeing this, the guru said, 'All right, what work can you do?' The guru suggested several jobs, but the young man was not accustomed to any of them. Finally, he said, 'Why don't you look after our horses?'

"The young man said, 'As you wish.'

"He was put in charge of the horses. The new disciple did his duty with great dedication. Soon the horses became stronger and healthier.

"The guru usually did not give any special instructions to his disciples. Every morning, he would give them a verse which they had to contemplate and put into practice in their lives. That was his method of teaching.

"One morning, the guru began earlier than usual. He gave the disciples their daily verses and was about to depart on a journey on one of the horses, when the young disciple came running for his instructions. He had been busy with his work and therefore could not come when the guru had called earlier. 'O Master,' he said, 'what is my lesson for today?' The guru replied sternly, 'Don't you know I am going on a journey? Is this the time for such a question?' He then mounted the horse and trotted off The youth was not disappointed. He started meditating on the guru's words, 'Don't you know I am going on a journey? Is this the time for such a question?'

"The guru returned in the evening. He couldn't find the young man among the other disciples. The guru asked about him. The others said in ridicule, 'That silly fellow is sitting somewhere muttering something like, 'Don't you know I am going on a journey? Is this the time for such a question?' All of them started laughing. The guru understood what had happened. He called the young man and asked what he was doing. He said, 'Master, I was contemplating what

you said to me this morning.' The guru's eyes filled with tears. He put his hands on the disciple's head and blessed him. The other disciples did not Hkc this at all. They let the guru know about their complaint: 'Master, you ignored all of us who have been here for so long. Why give so much love to that lool?'

"The guru asked one of them to go and get some intoxicating substance. When the intoxicant came, he mixed it with water and poured a little into everyone's mouth, then asked them to spit it out immediately. Then he asked, 'Did anyone feel intoxicated?'

"'How would that be possible? Didn't you ask us to spit it out right away?'

"The guru said, 'This is also how you take in my morning instructions. Hearing what I say, you forget it immediately. The young man you are complaining about, however, is not like that. He accepts whatever I tell him, without a trace of doubt. He has that innocence in him. Besides, when the horses were in your charge, they were just skin and bones because you didn't feed them properly. You didn't wash them, and they were also irritable and would kick
anyone who approached them. When I put him in charge, the horses became healthy and gained weight. Now if anyone approaches them, they will come closer and show love by the movement of their heads. He has given them not only food, but love as well. He has done his duty sincerely and regularly, doing each action for its own sake. Above all, he is able to absorb my words totally, without questioning.'

"Children, we have to be like that. We shouldn't consider one word of the guru as meaningless. We should be ready to reflect on his words and assimilate them totally. The guru cannot withhold his grace from flowing to anyone who does that."

One woman among the devotees asked, "Amma, if someone becomes detached from the world after he is married, is it proper for him to forsake his wife and children?" Her husband, who was standing next to her, laughed when he heard his wife's question. Everyone else joined in the laughter.

Mother (laughing): "Don't be afraid, my daughter. Mon (son) will not leave you and come here. If he does, we will make him run back to you." Everyone laughed.

Mother continued, "Once you are married, you cannot abandon everything just like that and leave. But if you have achieved intense detachment, and if there is enough wealth for the family to live on without you, then you can renounce everything. But the detachment has to be real like the detachment Buddha and Ram tirtha had.

"It is never right to enter sannyasa just to escape from one's responsibilities. The sense of detachment has to be ripe. Otherwise, it would be like prematurely breaking open an egg before it is fully matured."

A devotee: "Amma, I don't feel like going to work at all now. There is no value given to truth or dharma there, and my co-workers hurt me in different ways if I don't dance to their tune."

Mother: "This problem is not just yours, son. Many of the children who come here complain about this. These days, it is difficult to do your work honestly. Truth and dharma have no value, and thus we are suffering the consequences. Those who go out into the world to work will have to overcome many obstacles. Those who stick to truth and honesty may be troubled by the deeds of their colleagues. Yet, what is the use of being sorry and weak? Son, don't pay any attention to what others are doing. Act according to your own conscience. God will not abandon those who do this. Those who do wrong for the sake of their own immediate gain are unaware of the suffering that lies ahead. They will have to experience the consequences of their actions, if not today, then tomorrow."

Mother stopped briefly, and then asked, "What time is it, children?"

A devotee: "It is past eleven."

Mother: "You go to bed now, children. Amma hasn't yet read the letters that came this morning. Let Amma go to Her room."

Mother got up, and as She neared the steps leading up to her room, a devotee came running and prostrated.

Mother: "What is it, son?"

Devotee: "I am leaving early in the morning, Amma. I won't be able to see you before I leave. That is why I am troubling you now."

Mother (laughing): "How can it be a trouble for Amma?"

Devotee: "I didn't get a chance to tell you the reason for my visit, Amma. My daughter's wedding is next week. Everything has worked out as you said. I don't have to give even a paise as dowry. The boy is working in the Persian Gulf area and says he will be taking her there. His family is well off financially."

This man had been trying to arrange his daughter's marriage for seven years. The planet Mars was not favourable in her horoscope. They had considered many marriage proposals, but most of the time the horoscopes hadn't matched. Even when they had matched, somehow the proposals fell through. For a long time, the father had felt anxious about the whole matter. Then he heard about Mother and brought his daughter to see Her. Mother gave her a mantra, and said, "There is no need to run around after this anymore. Chant this mantra with devotion, daughter, and everything will be all right." Three weeks later, a marriage proposal came, through a distant relative. The horoscopes matched extremely well and a date was quickly fixed for the wedding.

"I have here the wedding ring for the boy. Amma, please bless it." He gave a small packet to Mother. She put it to Her eyes and handed it back to him.

Mother went to Her room. Leelabai, a householder devotee, was waiting outside the door to Mother's room. She was unhappy that her tali (wedding necklace) was lost somewhere.

Mother: "Daughter, didn t you bring it to give to Amma? Think that God has taken it. Why feel sorry about it?"

Leela was from Kottayam. Her youngest daughter lived at the ashram, and went to school from there. Leela's father disapproved of his granddaughter living at the ashram.

Mother: "How is your father?"

Leela: "He doesn't like our coming here at all. He scolds us for it all the time."

Mother: "But that is normal! Who likes to see the daughters of the family going on the spiritual path?"

Leela: "Amma, aren't you the one who causes all this disapproval?"

Mother: "Oh, really? Who says that?" Mother laughed.

"When you enter spiritual life, you are likely to hear many objections. Only when you overcome them, and move beyond them, does it become clear how strong your bond with God is. If your father is angry with you, it is his samskara. Why worry about it? Coming to the ashram is your samskara.

"Suppose strong winds and heavy rains start just as we are about to go somewhere. If we become scared and stay inside, we won't reach our destination. One who has a sincere desire to reach the goal has to ignore these obstacles and go forward. If you just remain indoors, it shows that you don't yearn for the goal that much.

"Strive to reach the goal, transcending whatever obstacles there may be. That is real courage. Others will voice their opinion, each according to their background. There is no need to fret about what they say. Give those people only the importance they deserve, but do not resent them."

Mother went into Her room.

The midnight moon peered into the room through the window curtains. Mother began writing letters to Her children all over the world, many of them fast asleep at that hour. She wiped their tears with her words.

When She saw that the brahmacharini who had been taking dictation had fallen asleep over the sheets of paper, Mother took the pen in Her own hand. She started applying the cool sandal paste of Her consoling words to the burning minds of Her children everywhere. Perhaps She also entered their dreams at that time, causing their parched lips to light up with a smile...

CHAPTER TWO

Wednesday, June 26, 1985

DEVOTION

Mother and the brahmacharis were in the meditation room. With them were some householder devotees, such as Padmanabhan and Divakaran.

Padmanabhan, a bank official from Kozhikode, mentioned the recent visit of a homeopathic doctor and his family to the ashram.

Mother: "Amma remembers them. He considers himself to be a great believer in advaita but his wife is filled with devotion. Perhaps he came for darshan because she asked him to. He put on big airs when he came in. 'There is no Rama or Krishna,' he said. Amma said, 'Everyone ultimately reaches the same place, but you need an upadhi (an instrument or prop) for doing sadhana. How can you say there is no Rama or Krishna? Even if you don't see Ochira on a map of India, can you say there is no place called Ochira? Our sense of advaita is just limited to our words. It is not possible to bring it into our experience without devotion.' He did not say anything after that."

Mother took up a pen lying nearby and wrote 'Namah Shivaya' on Her left forearm. As She wrote that mantra, it seemed She entered into a divine mood. Intently looking at the mantra on her arm, Mother said to Padmanabhan, "In the early days, Amma used to hold the pillow close to Her heart when She went to bed. She would kiss the pillow repeatedly. She could not see it as a pillow; She felt it was Devi. Sometimes She would lie there with Her Hips to the wall, imagining She was kissing the Divine Mother. Or She would write 'Namah Shivaya' on the pillow and the mat and then kiss the name. She wouldn't fall asleep before nearly falling unconscious, calling Devi again and again, crying for Her."

Mother became silent and sat still. Her eyes slowly closed. One could see on Her face the waves of bliss that were rising within Her. Everyone sat in meditation, with their eyes riveted on Mother.

A brahmachari sang the song, 'Mouna ghanamrtta santiniketam. .

In the abode of impenetrable Silencey
Of eternal beauty and peace
Where the mind of Gautama Buddha was dissolved
In the Effulgence that destroys all bond
On the Shore of Bliss
Which lies beyond the reach of thought...
In the knowledge that bestows eternal harmony
The Abode without beginning or end.
The Bliss known only when
The movements of the mind subside
At the Seat of Power,
The Region of utter Consciousness...
At the Goal that bestows the sweet State
Of eternal non-duality.
Described as 'Thou art That';
That is the place where I long to reach.
But I can only do so
Through your Grace.

The song ended, and after a little while, Mother opened Her eyes.

THE NATURE OF THE GURU

Divakaran: "I have a friend. He lived with a swami for some time and received a mantra from him. One day the swami scolded him for something, and my friend left that very day."

Mother: "Son, in spiritual life, if you accept someone as your guru, you should have complete faith in and dedication towards him. Sometimes the guru may be very stern, for the good of the disciples; but the disciple should never find fault with the guru for that. A guru may be stern, but he doesn't identify with it. A mother may slap her child to stop it from putting its hand in the fire. Is she doing it out of spite towards the child? No, it is only to save the child from danger. Your friend should have understood that it was for his own good that the guru scolded him."

Divakaran: "He said that he left because he could not emulate many of the things the guru did."

Mother: "The disciple should not do everything the guru does. That will hinder his progress. No one can emulate the guru completely. Using discrimination, we should decide which actions of the guru will be appropriate, and we should copy only those actions. One should never think, Didn't my guru do this, so why can't I do the same thing?' The mahatmas, who have attained perfection, have no bonds. They are like giant trees to which even elephants can be chained. There is no need of a fence around such trees. But we are like small plants, that have to fear the cows and the goats. We need a fence to protect ourselves from them. The actions of the mahatmas are not like ours. We should not try to copy all their actions.

"The actions of a normal human being arise from the belief, I am this body.' But a mahatma lives with the understanding that he is pure consciousness. Therefore, many of his actions will be difficult for ordinary people to understand.

"Once there was a mahatma. Every morning, he would boil some oil and immediately pour it over his body. Then he would proceed to take his bath. One of his disciples saw this and thought that this must be the source of all the guru's powers. The next day he too boiled some oil and poured it on himself. You can guess the consequences!

(Everyone laughed.) If we imitate everything the guru does, this may become our experience too. Therefore, we should adopt only those things that will benefit us."

SADHANA IS INDISPENSABLE

Divakaran: "I have not seen, in any of the other ashrams I have visited, a routine similar to what is followed here. I see that meditation and karma yoga are stressed here. In many other places, scriptural study is given the highest importance."

Mother: "As long as thoughts about worldly affairs bother us, we need to practice a strict routine of japa and meditation to rise above them. In the beginning it is necessary to put a lot of effort into this practice. In due course, it will become natural. Only through sadhana can we make progress. Without sadhana, we have nothing. What is the use of studying books and giving speeches? What difference is there between someone who gives speeches and a tape recorder? He will just mouth what he has learned, that's all. Will our hunger be satisfied by reading cookbooks? We have to cook something and eat it. Tapas (austerities) are what is needed. It will enhance the good vasanas and qualities in us. Purity and concentration of mind are most important.

"Amma is not saying that one need not study the scriptures; but along with study, sadhana is needed. Sadhana is the primary thing. There should not be any lapse in it.

Sadhana should become part of our nature, just like brushing our teeth and taking a bath.

"Having received training in the ashram, when we go out into the world dressed in the clothes provided by the ashram, thousands of people will love and respect us. Yet Amma says to Her children that those who call them bad names are their greatest gurus. Only such unpleasant

treatment will make us look at ourselves carefully. When there are only people who love us, we won't examine ourselves. When others show hostility, we should ask, 'Why are they hostile towards me? What mistakes have I made to deserve such treatment?' Thus, the accusations against us will become steps leading to our growth."

Padmanabhan: "Amma, what is best, striving for our own liberation first, or working for the good of others?"

Mother: "Our selfishness has to disappear completely before we are able to think only of the good of others. We should first try to achieve that state of mind. Our prayers and our actions, which are done to achieve that, form the path to liberation. We need to forget ourselves completely and to think only of the welfare of others. When we dedicate ourselves solely to the well-being of others, it is our own mind that becomes pure."

A brahmachari who was listening to this conversation asked about the power of the guru. Mother said in reply, "There are different kinds of gurus. Satgurus can bestow liberation merely by their sankalpa (resolve). Even their breath is beneficial to nature."

Br: "It is said that the guru will protect the disciples from all dangers. If danger threatens a disciple when the guru is in samadhi how will he know about it and give his protection?"

Mother: "After all, no one is separate from the Self Isn't everyone contained in the Self? Even though a river has two separate banks, there is only one river bed. When the guru is in samadhi, he is merged in the Self He will know about the situation."

THE GREATNESS OF DEVOTION

Padmanabhan: "Amma, a lot of people don't recognize the greatness of devotion at all. And many of the people who go to temples and pray daily don't seem to lead very spiritual lives."

Mother: "There is a belief that devotion means going to a lot of temples to worship a hundred different deities. The devotion of such people is blind faith, and is not based on an understanding of spiritual principles. Others who see this may think that is all there is to devotion, and will criticize anything to do with devotion. Spiritual people will not oppose tattvattile bhakti (devotion based on spiritual knowledge).

"We should understand that God-realization is the aim of life, and worship Him with this goal firmly fixed in our mind. Devotion in principle' means recognizing that it is the one and the same God who manifests in all living beings and in all the deitiesâ€”in all names and forms. It means
surrendering selflessly to Him. That is the kind of devotion we should have.

"It is hard to become established in jnana (spiritual wisdom), without devotion. With gravel alone we cannot build anything; we need to add cement as well, and make concrete. We cannot build the steps leading to God without adding the binding quality of love.

"There may be many types of foods, but those who suffer from indigestion or other illnesses cannot eat everything. But *kanji* (rice gruel), made with broken rice, is agreeable to everyone's health. The path of devotion is like that. It suits everyone.

"When the sense of 'I persists, we need a center {upadhi) to focus our minds on, so that we can eliminate the ego. Devotion is the love for that center; it is the intense eagerness to realize the goal. Devotion can also be compared to the tincture used for cleaning a wound. Devotion purifies the mind.

"The field that is the mind should be irrigated with the water of devotion, so that the seed of knowledge can be sown. Then we can harvest the crop of liberation. Anyone who has prema bhakti ”devotion with supreme love” even for a second, will never waver from it. But such devotion does not arise in everyone. Not everyone who enters a lottery gets first prize. That only goes to one person among millions. True loving devotion is like that; only one in a million will experience it."

In the middle of Her praise of the greatness of devotion, Mother fell silent. Her mind left the external world and soared to some higher plane. As She sat with Her eyes half-closed, Her

motionless form reminded everyone of the Divine Mother, who is beyond all attributes, and who does everything, while appearing to be actionless.

Duality embraced for the sake of devotion is far more beautiful than non-duality.

A little later. Mother opened Her eyes. But She was not in the mood to talk. Her face showed that She was in some other world. Was this the same Mother who had been so eloquent just a few minutes before?

A few more minutes passed. Mother went up to a child and gave him two pieces of candy from a packet a devotee had offered Her. Planting a kiss on the head of the child. Mother said: "This candy gives sweetness now, but it will ruin your teeth later. If you know God, you can enjoy sweetness all the time¶€”and it is not bad for the teeth either!"

From the meditation room Mother went to the darshan hut. One by one, all the devotees who were waiting there approached Her and prostrated. A woman embraced Mother tightly and started crying. She had been married for many years, yet she had no children. This was the cause of her grief

Mother: "Daughter, you are crying because you have no children. But those who have children shed tears when they see the behavior of their children!"

Mother pulled the woman up and wiped her tears, saying, "Don't worry, daughter. You pray to God. Amma will make a sankalpa for you."

Rays of expectation and hope shone on the woman's face.

MOTHER'S INSTRUCTIONS

Mother asked a child sitting nearby to sing a kirtan. The sweet sound flowed gently from the child, who exhibited no trace of bashfulness or pride. Mother kept time by clapping Her hands, and joined the others in singing 'Devi Devi Jaganmobini/ Some devotees sat in meditation. ...

O Goddess, Enchantress of the World,
O Chandikuy slayer of the demons
Chanda and Munda,
O Chamundesvariy Divine Mother,
Show us the right path
To cross the ocean of transmigration.

The song ended. Mother started talking again. "You should hear Sugunacchan (Mother's father) doing japa. It is very interesting. He chants, "Narayana, Narayana...' at a very high speed without stopping for breath." (Everyone laughed as Mother did an imitation.) "The mind will not wander if you chant like that. No one taught him this, he began this himself."

Mother went to Her room, but emerged soon after and began pacing back and forth in the courtyard. Then She came to the ashram office and sat down. Three or four brahmacharis were with Her.

The office was a small room. Mother picked up some of the envelopes that were lying on a table. They were replies to letters, ready to be mailed.

Mother: "Son, who wrote the addresses on these envelopes? Is this how to write anything? See how carelessly it is done! Shouldn't the addresses be written neatly, even if it takes a little extra time? Or get someone with good handwriting to do it. Who can read it if you write like this, with letters running into each other? This should be done again. A sadhak should do everything with shraddha."

She was about to give the envelopes to a brahmachari when She noticed the stamps.

Mother: "What are you children thinking about when you do these things? All these stamps are fixed upside down! This is nothing but carelessness. We can learn about a person's lakshya bodha (intent on the goal) clearly from his actions.

"All of you have come here as seekers of God. You are not going to reach Him without patience and alertness. How will you get concentration in meditation, if you cannot show shraddha in these little things on the gross plane? Meditation is very subtle. It is the shraddha and patience we show in little things that leads us to great achievements.

"Listen to this story. There was a mahatma who told his wife that she should always place a glass of water and a needle next to him when he sat down to eat his meals.The wife followed these instructions regularly, without asking him the reason for this. Finally, when the husband became very old and was close to death, he asked her, 'Do you want to ask me anything?' She said, 'There is nothing I need from you, but I would like to know one thing. All these years, I have followed your instruction regularly and placed a glass of water and a needle next to you when you ate. But I never understood what they were for.' The mahatma replied, 'If a grain of rice were to fall on the floor as you served or as I ate, I wanted to pick it up with the needle, clean it by dipping it in the water and eat it. But because of our alertness, not even a single grain fell on the floor during all those years. Therefore, I didn't have to use the needle and the water.'

"They were careful throughout a whole lifetime not to spill even a single grain of rice. Only those who have shraddha like that have become mahatmas."

Br: "We will put these letters in new envelopes and mail them, Amma."

Mother: "That would mean wasting these envelopes, son! Where do we have money to waste like that? Don't waste these stamps, either. It is enough to write the addresses neatly on pieces of paper and paste over the old writing. Just be careful from now on."

Going into the library next to the office. Mother sat down on the floor before the brahmacharis had a chance to spread something for Her to sit on. Picking up an illustrated book of stories on the sportings of Krishna, She started looking at each picture carefully. One picture showed Krishna standing with the Govardhana mountain lifted up on the tip of His little finger. It was raining heavily, and all the cows and cowherds had taken shelter under the mountain.

A brahmachari standing next to Mother saw the picture and asked, "Amma, wasn't Lord Krishna showing a siddhi when he lifted up the Govardhana mountain?"

Mother: "Lord Krishna didn't lift up the mountain to convince others of his power, or to earn their respect. That action was necessary under those circumstances. It was raining heavily. There was no other way to protect those who were with Him. So He did what He had to."

After a short silence. Mother continued, "The aim of a mahatma is to lead people to the path of righteousness. Countless evil people have undergone a change of heart just by receiving the darshan of a mahatma."

Hearing the lunch bell ring. Mother said, "Children, go and eat now. Amma has some work to do," and She left for Her room.

MANASA PUJA (MENTAL WORSHIP)

A brahmachari was waiting for Mother in Her room. He read to Her an article he had written for Matruvani, the ashram magazine.

Mother: "Is your meditation going all right, son?"

Br: "I am not getting enough concentration, Amma."

Mother: "Try practicing manasapuja, son. The mind is like a cat. We may take care of it with a lot of affection, but the moment our attention wanders, it will stick its head in the pot and steal some food. Manasa puja is a method to keep the wayward mind fixed on God.

"You should do mental worship, crying out, Mother!, Mother!' with love and devotion and intense yearning. Imagine holding the Divine Mother's hand and bathing Her by pouring water over Her. Picture the water falling on all parts of Her body and running down. All the while, call out to Her, 'Mother, Mother!' and visualize Her form. Imagine doing abhisheka, with milk, honey, ghee, sandal paste, and rose water, one after the other. When these substances flow down Her body, visualize each part of Her form, from head to foot. Talk to Her and pray to Her. After bathing Her thus, dry Her body with a cloth. Drape a silk sari around Her. Adorn Her with ornaments. Put a vermilion mark on Her forehead."

Mother stopped the description and sat in meditation for a long time.

Then She opened Her eyes and continued, "Put anklets on Her. Put a garland on Her neck and enjoy Her beauty. Now do archana with flowers. Take the flower, which represents your mind, and imagine offering its petals, one by one, at Her feet. Or imagine offering your vasanas in a fire burning in front of Her. After the archana, offer Her the payasam of your love. Picture that you are doing arati for Her, and see each part of Her body shining brilliantly in the light of the

flame. In the end, imagine that you are circumambulating Mother. All the while, keep praying to Her.

"Son, try to do all this Nithya prema. Then your mind will not wander anywhere."

Mother's words gave new energy to the brahmachari on his path of sadhana. He went out of Her room with a sense of fulfillment, having just seen some of Mother's countless faces: the all-knowing guru showing Her disciples the way; the loving Mother, always concerned about the welfare of Her children; and the able administrator who runs the affairs of the ashram with great skill.

Friday, July 5, 1985

A teacher and his friend arrived from Kozhencheri at six o'clock in the evening to see Mother. Having washed their hands and feet, they came inside the kalari and prostrated. The musical instruments for bhajans were in place. One of the visitors said to the brahmachari who was tuning the tabla, "We started from home this morning, but we are late getting here because we were not sure of the way. We would like to see Mother and return tonight.'"

Br: "Mother just went to Her room. She was here talking to everyone until now. Perhaps you can see Her when She comes down for bhajans."

Their faces showed their disappointment at having missed Mother's darshan by just a few minutes.

Br: "It may be difficult for you to go back tonight, because it is hard to get a bus this late. You can see Mother and then go back tomorrow."

The teacher: "I promised my family that I will get back tonight. They will be worried. If we could just see Mother for a moment. I'm sure that if we get Her blessings, there won't be any problem."

Br: "How did you hear about Mother?"

Teacher: "The father of one of my students told me about Her. When he talked about Her, his eyes were filled with tears. He told me that his wife had been bedridden for the last four years. She couldn't even get up without somebody's help. They tried many treatments, but nothing worked. Then last year they came to see Mother, and after receiving Mother's blessings, his wife recovered completely. My friend told me that he and his wife came here to see Mother just last week."

The brahmachari spread a straw mat for the visitors, and said, "You may sit here. If you really have to go back tonight, you can prostrate to Mother when She comes for bhajans, and then leave."

Teacher: "My father-in-law visited me the other day. He often goes to hear spiritual discourses. When I talked about Mother, he asked me whether She is Self-realized. What should I say?"

Br: "The other day I heard someone asking Mother the same question. She said, 'Oh, Amma is just a crazy girl who doesn't know anything!' But the man would not leave it at that. He asked Her again. Finally, Mother said, 'Don't ask a mother of ten children whether she has ever given birth to a child!'"

It was time for bhajans. All the brahmacharis were ready. Mother came to the kalari, and the teacher and his friend came forward and prostrated.

Mother put Her hands on their shoulders and said, "Did you just come, children? Amma was down here until just a little while ago, and went to Her room only for a short time.

Teacher: "We came just after you had gone to your room, Amma. It is very fortunate for us to be able to see you now. We promised to be back home tonight; otherwise, we wouldn't mind staying until tomorrow."

Mother: "Do you want to ask me anything, children?" She led them to the verandah of the meditation room. There they sat down, while the bhajan started in the kalari.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Teacher: "I have no financial problems, Amma, but I am very worried about my children. I get no peace of mind."

Mother: "Son, when your mind is restless, try to chant your mantra. If you seek solace in anything else, all will be lost. If you don't get peace of mind from one thing, you will look for something else. Faling that, you will again look for something else. You won't experience any peace at all. No peace will be experienced in anything. Whereas, if you remember God and chant your mantra, you will quickly become very calm and peaceful. Your mind will have the power to face any situation."

Teacher: "Amma, sometimes I even think of becoming a sannyasi."

Mother: "That is something to be decided only after a lot of thought, son. Sannyasa is not something to sneak away to and embrace when you are facing sorrow. It has to come from your understanding of the ideals. Spiritual life is possible only for someone with a lot of patience. Otherwise, only disappointment will be the result. In spiritual life, you need the same kind of discipline and self-restraint as one in prison. Later, that prison will become the path to freedom. If a sadhak always looks towards God, then he will be able to reach his goal.

"Many people have asked the children here, 'Why are you living in the ashram? Can't you get a job and lead a comfortable life?' They reply, 'We have lived outside with enough money and all the comforts of life, but we didn't get any peace of mind. Here, we experience peace and tranquillity, without any of those comforts. Through japa and meditation, we are trying to maintain that peace always. We have learned from experience that you can find real peace only through remembering God. It is that experience that makes us want to stay at the ashram.'"

Teacher: "Even though this is our first visit, we have talked to people who have come here often. Each of them sees you differently, Amma. Some see you as Devi, others as Krishna, still others as their guru. To some, you are the Mother who is the abode of love and affection. In the eyes of some people, you are just a normal woman. Which of these is the real you, Amma? We would like to know."

Mother: "Children, each one sees according to his sankalpa. The same woman is wife to her husband, mother to her child, and sister to her brother. Similarly, isn't a man seen differently by his wife, his mother, and his daughter? The same person's behaviour is different towards his mother and his children. The difference is in the concept one has, in the sankalpa. Take a beautiful flower. The bee comes to it for the nectar; the poet writes a poem about it; the painter paints a picture; to the worm, it is food; the scientist separates the petals, the pollen, and the seed and does research on them; the devotee offers it to his deity. Each sees the flower according to his ability and his culture."

After a brief pause. Mother continued, "Son, all the labels are given by others. Amma doesn't say that She is a mahatma or that She is God. Her aim is simply to protect people from the heat of worldly life by bringing them under the umbrella of God. It is to bring about a change, if possible, in the minds of those who do harm to those who are weaker than themselves, and to help them to do good things, which will benefit themselves and the world. In Her mind, there is no difference between those who love Her and those who hate Her."

Teacher: "Some people have said that this is a place that leads young people astray."

Mother: "Son, before we voice an opinion about anything, shouldn't we inquire about it, observe it, and test it? Yet many people are in the habit of passing judgment on something without knowing anything about it, or having had any experience of it. How can someone who genuinely seeks the truth accept the opinion of such people?

"There are many who had very bad habits and reformed completely after coming here. Those who used to drink regularly have given up alcohol. So how can you say this is a bad place? Why give any value to something that is said, without knowing or experiencing what is going on?

"There are people who are willing to buy a worthless sari at any price if we tell them that it is imported from abroad. They don't value anything made at home, no matter how good it is. "Someone listens to a song on the radio and says, 'Oh, what a sweet song!' If his friend points out that it is the woman living next door who is singing, he will change his mind: 'Oh, really?

That explains it. I actually thought it was horrible.' This is human nature. People have lost the ability to tell the difference between good and bad. They decide beforehand what they will see and say."

Teacher (indicating the man who is with him): "This is a close friend of mine. He is having some serious difficulty. His business is in trouble, and he is losing money."

Mother: "The time may not always be favorable, son. There are certain times that are bad. But always remember that God can help alleviate the problems to a large extent."

Teacher: "He does not believe in temples and the like."

Friend: "Amma, God is everywhere, is He not? He is not confined to the four walls of a temple."

Mother: "Don't look at it that way, son. There is wind everywhere; still, we use fans, don't we? Isn't the comfort we get beneath the shade of a tree something special? The atmosphere is not the same everywhere. The feeling you get in a temple is not what you get in your office. Don't you feel a special peace and coolness in the temple environment? That is the quality of the atmosphere where God is remembered constantly.

"Don't think it is a waste of time to go to the temple. The children in the first grade need some seeds or marbles to learn how to count. Once they have learned, they no longer need any of those things. With the help of a floating log, you can easily learn to swim. Once you know how to swim, you can throw away the log.

"An athlete who has won a prize in the long jump is able to jump several meters, but it will take a lot of practice before a child can jump that far. Even with practice, everyone may not be able to do it. There may be a few mahatmas who see God in everything; you can count them on your fingers. They don't need temples. Nevertheless, we have to think of all the others, who can reach the Supreme Truth only through such means."

Mother got up saying, "Children, Amma will go for bhajans now. Both of you, wait until the bhajans are over before going home.'

Before they could say anything. Mother walked towards the kalari and joined the singing. The sweetness of devotion filled the air while everyone sang 'Kannun 'irillatta kannukalenkilum. .. '

Though my eyes are tearless
My heart is throbbing with pain;
Though my tongue is silent.
It is full of Thy mantra, O Mother!
O mystical wish-fulfilling tree,
My mind constantly dwells on Thy flowers
But the cruel hunter that is Maya
Is taking aim to cut me down!
You are the Auspicious One,
Who has come to spread
Randal paste on my soul.
Cool me in the moonlight of your love
And make me fulfilled!

When the arati was over, a family approached Mother and prostrated. They lived in Kozhencheri.

Mother: "Did you come from home today, children?"

Devotee: "We came to visit a relative near here, in Kayamkulam. We thought we'd come to the ashram before returning home."

Mother: "Wasn't it a month ago that you were here?" Devotee: "Yes. We couldn't come after that. My father was bedridden with rheumatism." Mother: "How is he now?"

Devotee: "He is well now. He will come here with us next week."

Mother: "Amma will give you some prasadam for him. Are you going home tonight?"

Devotee: "Yes, Amma. My daughter has to work tomorrow."

Mother: "But how will you go this late at night?" Devotee: "We came in a jeep."

Mother: "Oh, there are two other children here who have come from your area." They were going to go back earlier by bus, but Amma asked them to stay for bhajans."

Devotee: "That is no problem. There is plenty of room in the jeep; we are only three."

Mother introduced the teacher and his friend to them. The teacher said, "We were about to leave soon after seeing Amma. When She asked us to stay until after the bhajans, we were afraid that we would miss the last bus. Now we see that all our problems will be over if we put our trust in Amma."

Mother asked a brahmacharini to bring vibhutt (holy ash) and gave some of it to everyone as prasadam. She gave a special portion for the devotee's father. After instructing a brahmacharini to see that everyone got supper. Mother returned to Her room.

Monday, July 8, 1985

It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and Mother was sitting in the kalari. A brahmachari who had gone to buy vegetables in town came back with the packages. He carried a sack full of rice on his head, and was balancing a bag of vegetables on his shoulder. Clearly, he was carrying more than he could comfortably manage.

Seeing his difficulty. Mother took the sack of rice from his head and put it down. She asked: "Did you go alone when you had all these things to buy? Couldn't you have taken someone with you?"

Br: "I didn't think it would be this heavy." Two brahmacharis took the bags to the kitchen.

Mother: "Of course. How could you tell how heavy your purchases would be without ever having done any work at home, or being used to Hfting a heavy a load? How did you lift the sack of rice to your head?"

Br: "The man running the ferry helped."

Mother: "Poor son! From now on, don't go to the market alone." She ran Her fingers through his hair. The son stood there enjoying Mother's loving caress, blissfully forgetting everything else.

THE HAPPINESS AND SORROW OF WORLDLY LIFE

Returning to the kalari. Mother sat down again. A woman approached and prostrated. Mother embraced her, holding her close. The woman put her head in Mother s lap and started sobbing. "If only Amma makes a sankalpa, all my troubles will be over," she kept saying.

Patting her on the back, Mother consoled her: "Daughter, is it enough if Amma makes a sankalpa? You should become ready to accept it. Even if Amma turns on the light, you have to open the door before the light can get in. If all the doors are closed tightly, how can you receive the light? Even when Amma makes a resolve, for it to benefit you, you have to think of God. You should set apart some time for chanting God's name every day. How much time do we waste every day! Is it enough to say that Amma should make everything all right when you yourself are not making any effort?"

The woman believed that all her troubles came from evil spells cast by her neighbors, and she was trying to convince Mother of this. She wanted Mother to punish her neighbors and to protect her. She had repeated this demand several times. Mother s voice became stern when it became clear that the woman was not paying attention to anything She was saying. The woman's complaining stopped, and she began listening to Mother with fear and reverence.

Mother: "At present, there are two kinds of happiness and sorrow. When we don't get what we want, we feel sad; but when others get what they wish, our sadness is even greater. Similarly, we are happy when we succeed in something; but we are even happier when others fail. Forgetting all our sorrows, we rejoice when we see the sorrows of others. Our own daughter may be unmarried, but we are happy that the neighbour s daughter is also unmarried. Then we become sad when her wedding takes place. Children, this is a depravity of the mind, a serious disease that eats away our peace. It is a cancer of the mind.

"Once two neighbors went to buy timber. One of them bought one log while the other bought three. When the first one cut his log he found it was hollow inside. He was very unhappy at having wasted his money, and he lost his appetite because of this. Then his wife came to him with the news that all three of the neighbor's logs were rotten inside. The man who had been stricken with grief until then, suddenly felt a burst of joy. 'O really! Get me some tea,' he said, laughing happily. 'He deserves it! He thinks he is so rich that he bought three.'

"Children, the first thing we need to do is to change this attitude. When our mind is like this, no amount of japa will benefit us. We will not get God's grace or any peace of mind. A pot that has contained something sour has to be cleaned thoroughly before we can pour any milk into it, otherwise the milk will go bad. Children, before anything else, we should pray for a heart that rejoices in the happiness of others, and empathizes with their sorrow.

"If our next door neighbor is crazy, we will also have problems. We will not be able to sleep because of the noise he makes at night. We may not even have any peace during the day. Think of the unhappiness we would face if our brother came home drunk every day and started a fight. Our peace would be completely lost. But, on the other hand, if our brother is good-natured, it will effect us in a positive way. When others live a quiet and peaceful life, we should realize that we are the ones who benefit from it. At least we are not getting any trouble from them! We should be able to rejoice in their happiness, and feel compassion for their sorrow. If we do, it means that we are progressing inwardly. It is in such hearts that God likes to reside. God's real children are those who see the happiness and sorrow of others as their own."

By now the woman was crying, and Mother paused to wipe her tears. "Don't feel bad, daughter. Regularly chant the mantra that Amma has given you. Everything will be all right."

The woman was consoled by this. She prostrated and got up. She said goodbye after having thus unloaded her burden of sorrow in front of the Mother, who is the refuge of all those who suffer. Aren't we sure to receive solace by bathing in that stream of unbroken peace, which flows towards all grieving hearts?

Saturday, July 20, 1985 NO COMPROMISE IN THE DISCIPLINE

The first glow of dawn had not yet appeared in the easternsky. The brahmacharis were doing archana in the meditation room, while Mother paced back and forth on the verandah in the darkness, with Her hands held behind Her back. There was an air of seriousness in the way She walked. Two men with flashlights passed by the banks of the canal on the southern side of the ashram. They were fishermen getting ready to cast their net.

At that moment, a brahmachari came running to join the archana. He must have been a little late getting up. As he quietly opened the door of the meditation room to go in. Mother stopped him by reaching out and closing the door tightly. The brahmachari stood beside the door with his head bowed.

After a few minutes Mother said: "Don't you know that the archana starts at five in the morning? If people come in one by one after it has started, everyone who is doing archana will lose their concentration. So now you should stay outside and do the archana. From tomorrow onwards, you should be in the meditation room by four-thirty. You have to be disciplined in your sadhana. Only then will you make any progress.

The brahmachari put his asana (meditation mat) on the verandah and sat down. The mantras resounded within the meditation room. The meaning of each mantra became clear as he fixed his mind on the holy feet of the Mother who was pacing in front of him with gentle steps.

Om nakhadititisamchanna namajjana tamogunayai namah...

Salutations to Her, whose radiant toenails dispel the ignorance of the devotees who prostrate in front of Her!

Salutations to Her whose feet defeat the lotus flowers in their radiance!

Salutations to Her whose auspicious lotus feet are adorned with gem-studded golden anklets that twinkle sweetly!

Salutations to Her whose gait is as slow and gentle as that of a swan!

Emerging after the archana, the brahmacharis were pleasantly surprised to see Mother. They all prostrated. Mother put her hands on the head of the son who had arrived late and blessed him.

Mother: "Son, were you sad when Amma stopped you from going in to join the archana?" What pain is there when one's heart melts in Mother s love, as the chandrakanta stone melts in the light of the full moon?

Mother: "This is an ashram, son. When we do archana at brahma muhurta (the sacred hour before dawn) all the children should take part in it. At that time there shouldn't be anyone sleeping, bathing, or doing anything like that. Everyone should be seated five minutes before the archana starts."

Br: "There was only a trickle of water coming out of the pipe. So I was late by the time I finished my bath."

Mother: "If you have an examination or a job interview, will you say you were late because there was no water or electricity? You should do your sadhana with the same attitude.

"When so many of you are doing the archana together, the Divine Mother is definitely present here. One shouldn't walk in or talk or sleep at that time. That is why Amma told you to do the archana outside, as they had already started inside."

Mother caressed all Her children with Her loving eyes and went to Her room. She emerged again at seven o'clock with a brahmacharini, and walked to the north side of the ashram. She gathered together the coconut fronds that had fallen there. A brahmachari took them all to the side of the kitchen. He did not waste the opportunity to clear some of his doubts:

Br: "Amma, can one eliminate the mind completely?"

Mother: "The mind is a collection of thoughts. Thoughts are like the waves of the ocean. They will keep rising up one after the other. One cannot stop the waves by force. But when the ocean is deep, the waves subside. Similarly, try to concentrate the mind on one thought, instead of trying to stop all thoughts by force. Then the ocean of the mind will become deeper. It will become quiet. Even if there are small waves on the surface, it will be peaceful below."

MOTHER'S COW SEVA

Mother reached the side of the cowshed. A brahmachari was washing a newly-purchased cow called Shantini, "the peaceful one," but there was no connection between her name and her behavior. So far, no one who tried to bathe her had escaped without getting at least one lash of her tail. To milk her was a battle, for it took three people, in addition to having to tie her feet. It was as if she had taken a vow to see that the milk ended up on the ground, or at least to give a milk bath to those who tried to milk her.

This brahmachari, who knew Shantini's nature well, was using a cup to pour water over her. He wet her body twice and called it her bath. The dirt and dung still stuck to her body. Mother did not like this way of washing the cow at all. She took the bucket of water from the brahmachari, while a brahmacharini went to the kitchen to get a piece of the rough outer husk of a coconut (used for scrubbing). Showing Her son how to wash the cow. Mother very carefully removed the dung that was sticking to the belly and legs of the cow and washed her clean.

Everyone was surprised at the sudden docility of Shantini, the like of which had never been seen in her before. She stood there like an obedient child. Perhaps, she had been waiting all this time for such an occasion.

While She was bathing the cow, Mother said, "Son, don t stand behind a cow when you wash her. She may kick. This one is a bit unruly; so you have to wash her carefully, standing at her side." Mother also showed how the cow should be tethered in the cowshed.

Hearing that Mother was washing the cow, two devotees came to watch. As She came out of the cowshed. Mother said to them: "The children here are not used to doing any of this. They have come here straight out of college, and before that they were pampered by their parents. They don't even know how to wash their own clothes. Yesterday Amma saw one of them trying to use Super-white' while washing his clothes. It would have been great fun if Amma hadn't gotten there just in time. He emptied a whole bottle of Super-white into half a bucket of water. When Amma got there, he was just about to dip his clothes into it. Imagine what would have happened!

(She laughed). He finished a whole month's supply of Super-white in just one washing. Amma showed him how to mix a little bit of the bluing with water in a bucket, and then dip the clothes into it."

ADVICE TO HOUSEHOLDERS

Mother was sitting on the verandah of the meditation room, and the devotees were sitting on the ground gathered around Her. Mr. Menon from Palakkad started the conversation.

Menon: "Amma, I practice meditation, but because of various problems, I am never free from sorrow. I have talked to many other householders like myself, and most are in the same predicament. I even wonder sometimes why one does japa and meditation."

Mother: "Son, just doing japa and meditation is not enough. One should assimilate the basic principles. When Amma was young. She used to cut the branches of a kampatti tree. She had to chmb up the tree, and the first time She did this. Her entire body got burnt. Her face was so swollen. She couldn't see anything. It took two or three days for Her to become normal again. Then She found out that one should rub oil on the body first. After that. She would always use the protection of oil when breaking the branches of the kampatti tree. Similarly, you should have the protective coating of your love for God before entering family life. Then there will be no cause for sorrow.

"One should have the conviction that God is one's only real relative. Children, you should know that eventually all other relations and worldly objects will give nothing but sorrow. Let your bond be with God alone. This does not mean that you should abandon your wife and children, or that you should see them as strangers. Take good care of them, but know that the only lasting relative you have is God. All others will leave you today or tomorrow; therefore, always take refuge in Him. Think that the difficulties in life are for your own good, then there will be peace and bliss in the family."

A devotee: "Can we live like those who do great tapas?"

Mother: "Amma is not saying that householders should undertake severe austerities, but try to chant the holy name while you perform any action. There is no need to worry about the purity of the body while chanting. God is everywhere. He is always in our hearts; we just don't know it. A diamond has a natural brilliance, but when it falls into oil it loses its lustre. Similarly, we are not able to recognize God because of our ignorance.

In the morning, chant the holy name for at least ten minutes after your bath. Meditate at least for a little while. Do the same in the evening. No matter who causes you grief, take your complaints to the puja room, where your real friend is. In addition to your husband or wife, you should have a friend‚€”and that friend should be God. Even if your husband or wife makes you unhappy, tell that to God, and not to anyone else. If your neighbour picks a fight with you, go to the puja room and complain, 'Why did you let him treat me like that? Weren't you with me?' Open your heart and tell God everything. Then it becomes a satsang.

"When someone makes you happy, tell God about that too. Forgetting God in times of happiness and remembering Him only in times of sorrow, is not a sign of true devotion. We should be able to see that He gives us both happiness and sorrow.

"Any spare time you have after work should be spent reading spiritual books like the Gita and the Ramayana, or the biographies of the mahatmas, or collections of their teachings, instead of going to the movies or engaging in other forms of ordinary entertainment. Don't waste any opportunity to participate in satsangs. Share with your friends the things you hear in satsangs, thus bringing mental peace to them as well. Observe brahmacharya (celibacy) at least two or three days a week. That is essential if you are to get the proper benefit from your sadhana. (Laughing) There is not just one wife‚€”the eyes, nose, tongue, ears, and the skin are all our 'wives.' We have to control our attachment to them also; then we can know the real essence within us.

A female devotee: "Amma, where is the time for satsang and reading after finishing the household chores and taking care of the children?"

Mother: "Those who want it will find the time. Even those who are constantly saying, a hundred times over, that they have no time will rush a sick child to the hospital, won't they? Even if the treatment takes three or four months, they won't leave the hospital and go to work. No matter how much you complain about the lack of time, when it comes to the health of your child, you always manage to find time. Similarly, when you are convinced that God is the one who protects you, and that there will not be peace in this life without taking refuge in Him, then you will find the time.

"If you cannot find free time to devote to the worship of God, try to be like the gopis. They did not set apart a separate time for prayer. They saw God while immersed in their work. They would repeat the holy name while churning the milk and grinding the grain, and doing all their other chores. The jars of pepper and coriander, and all the other spices, were labeled with the names of the Lord. When they wanted pepper they asked for Mukunda. When they gave someone coriander, they were giving Govinda. Those who came for milk and curd asked for them using the Lord's names. They were engaged in nothing but chanting Krishna's names everywhere, and at all times. Thus, they were always able to remember the Lord without any special effort. Those who are not able to set apart a special time for sadhana can still maintain remembrance of God in this way.

"Firmly fix the idea in your mind that only God is true and eternal. Chant your mantra while engaged in your work. Then there won't be any need for a special time to remember God. Your mind will always be focused on Him."

Devotee: "Is it not enough to meditate on the Self? Is it necessary to chant a mantra and so forth?"

Mother: "School children are asked to repeat poems and the multiplication table in order to commit them to memory. One reading may not be enough for everyone to memorize such things. Similarly, it will not be possible for everyone to fix their mind on the supreme principle just through meditation. Doing japa or singing devotional songs in solitude is also needed. If someone is able to do it through meditation, then he needs only that; there is no need for anything else. But when you chant a mantra or sing kirtans, your mind quickly becomes one-pointed. It won't run to external things as easily as at other times. Everyone can do this."

The devotees were arriving at the ashram. They were gathering around Mother to drink in the nectar of Her words. When their number became quite large, Mother went to the hut and started giving darshan.

A young woman who had lost her mental balance was brought in by her parents. Seeing their despair, Mother gave them permission to stay in the ashram for a few days. Someone had to be with the girl at all times. If no one was watching, she would run away, so there was always someone holding her hand. Mother gave a piece of sandalwood to the father and asked to him to frequently apply sandalwood paste to the girl's forehead.

Once the bhajans were over. Mother sat with the devotees and the brahmacharis in the courtyard in front of the kalari. The sick girl got out of her room and started running off, and her mother and sister followed her. A brahmacharini and another woman somehow caught the girl and brought her to Mother, who made her sit beside Her. The girl kept asking Mother meaningless questions. Mother listened to her with great attention, and soothed her by occasionally answering.

On Mother s instruction, the girl was taken to the water tap outside of the meditation room. Mother filled a bucket with water and poured it in a stream on the girl's head. She repeated this several times, while holding the girl's hand tightly to stop her from running away. This continued for about half-an-hour, whereupon there was a slight change in the girl's behavior. Mother made some sandal paste and applied it to the girl's forehead. Before sending her to her room with her mother, Mother did not forget to bestow an affectionate kiss on the girl's cheek.

Mother came back and sat down in the yard in front of the kalari. Calling Br. Balu, She asked him to sing a kirtan. Br. Srikumar played the harmonium. The ashram air filled with the blissful devotional music of 'Sri chakram ennoru chakram... '

In the mystical wheel Sri Chakram, Dwells the Goddess Sri Vidya. That Devi, who is the nature of motion. The One Power that moves the wheel of the Universe.

Sometimes riding on a lion.
Sometimes mounted on a swan.
Manifesting as the Shakti of Lord Brahma;
O Mother who leads and controls
The Divine Trinity,
Is not the Goddess Katyayani
Yet another of Thy forms?

The devotees pay obeisance to Thy forms For the alleviation of their miseries, O Mother, who among the human beings. Captivated by Maya, understands the truth That this human body is most despicable?

O Mother, Thou who sports riding on a tiger, How can one in ignorance hope to extol Thy most exalted majesty?

Tuesday, August 6, 1985

Mother came down the steps from Her room, dressed in pure white. All the devotees waiting for Her with joined palms began chanting softly, 'Amma, Amma....' Mother walked to the kalari accompanied by all Her children. Since there was not enough room inside for everyone, those who did not get a seat inside waited outside for their turn. Mother s broad smile soothed everyone. Her compassionate eyes brought relief to the aching hearts.

A young woman put her head in Mother's lap and sobbed. Raising her head with Her hands. Mother affectionately wiped her tears. She consoled the young woman saying, "Don't cry, daughter! Amma is here for you! Don't cry!" Yet, the woman continued to weep, unable to control her sadness. Mother pulled her close and caressed her lovingly, gently stroking her back.

The young woman came from a rich family. She had fallen in love with one of her brother's friends. But because the young man belonged to a different caste, her family opposed their relationship. Nevertheless, their love had prevailed and they had gotten married. They had started their life together by renting a house, and the husband had borrowed some money to begin a business. The venture failed, and as the pressure from his creditors had grown intense, he had left home without telling anyone.

"Amma, he has abandoned me and the children. We have no one to look after us!" The woman kept repeating this, as she cried on Mother s shoulder.

Mother tried to console her. "Stop worrying, my daughter. Nothing has happened to him. He will come back."

The young woman raised her head from Mother s shoulder and asked, "Will my husband come back, Amma?"

Mother: "Surely, he will be back. Don't worry, daughter!" After a brief silence. Mother continued, "Amma will give you a mantra. Keep Devi on your mind always, and chant the mantra regularly. All your problems will be gone in one month."

The woman's face brightened. Hopeful expectation gleamed in her eyes. Mother closed Her eyes and sat in meditation for a little while. Then She opened Her eyes again, chanting "Shiva, Shiva!"

MOTHER'S DIVINE MOOD OF BHAKTI

One by one, the devotees prostrated in front of Mother and withdrew. Mr. Bhaskaran Nair from Thrissur came forward and prostrated. Since his wife's death, he had been spending all of his time in spiritual pursuits. He frequently came to the ashram to see Mother. The peace evident on his face, his humility, and the mala of tulasi beads around his neck, all spoke of his sattvic nature.

Mother opened the packet that Mr. Nair offered Her. It contained a picture and a biography of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Mother looked the book over, then opened it, and handed it to Mr. Nair, saying: 'To read a little, son. Amma will listen." He was very pleased and began reading:

"Once the love for God begins to blossom in your heart, then no other thought will enter. Will the tongue that has tasted rock candy yearn for the sweetness of other worthless things? The

blessed soul that has developed love for God is constantly intoxicated by it. The lover pines every second to be united with his beloved. He does not worry at all whether his beloved loves him or not in return. Every moment he is thinking of his dear beloved, brooding over the separation.

"Mahaprabhu s love was of this kind. The stream of prema that issued from the lake of his heart grew stronger and stronger. That Ganga of love never dried up as little streams do. One moment he would laugh, the next moment he would dance. All night long, he would drench his clothes in tears, crying without getting any sleep. He would sigh deeply, calling out 'Oh Krishna, Oh Krishna!' Mahaprabhu became mahatma from Bengal.incapable of performing the normal routine actions, such as bathing, eating, or offering his twilight prayers. He could not talk about or hear about anything but the exploits of Krishna. He knew none other than his ever-beloved Krishna."

Mr. Nair glanced at Mother as he was reading. She had become completely oblivious of the world. Her eyes closed slowly. The radiance of Her divine face seemed to fill the atmosphere. Tear drops rolled halfway down Her cheeks and stopped. The divine mood of bhakti in Mother spread to the devotees around Her, and everyone sat motionless, watching Her with unblinking eyes. A woman wept, loudly crying out "Amma, Amma!" Mr. Nair stopped reading and, with palms joined in devotion, sat gazing intently at Mother s face. Overcome with devotion, a woman started singing "Ayi giri nandininandita mo hini...'

O Daughter of the Mountain! Enchantress
Worshipped by all, worshipped by Nandini
You who sports with the universe
You who resides on Mount Vindhya,
O Goddess who is the wife of Shiva
You with a large family, You who have done
Many wondrous deeds. Victory to You,
O slayer of the demon Mahisha,
Beautiful beloved of Shiva,
Daughter of Himavat!

Opening Her eyes after about an hour-and-a-half, Mother continued giving darshan to the devotees. Then She went out and sat down in the shade between the Vedanta school and the hut. A few devotees and some brahmacharis gathered around Her. One was Surendran, who had sold liquor earlier in his life. After meeting Mother, he had discontinued that line of work, and now ran a general store next to his house.

THE PAST IS A CANCELLED CHECK

Surendran: "Amma, I have made many mistakes in my life, and the memories of that still bothers me greatly."

Mother: "Son, why are you worrying about past mistakes? What is past is past. If you fret about it, you will lose whatever strength you have now. Right now, make a firm decision that you will not make such mistakes again. That is what is necessary. Then your pure actions will cleanse your mind. Your desire to be good in thought and deed, and your effort in that direction, show the purity of your mind.

"At the time of your earlier actions, you didn't know that they were wrong; but now that you know they were wrong, you are trying to turn away from them. That is enough. When a small child throws a ball at its mother, she just smiles. She picks up her child and gives him a kiss. But when he is older, if he hurls something at her, she will not be so forgiving. Similarly, we have done many wrong things until now, without realizing it. God will forgive us for everything. But He will not forgive the mistakes we make after we come to know that they are wrong. We should therefore make the effort to avoid repeating our mistakes.

"There is no need to feel sorry about the way we have lived until now. That is like a canceled check. Or, it is like the errors you make when you write with a pencil. You have an eraser, and you can erase your mistakes, but you can do it only a couple of times. If you try to erase too many times in the same place, you will tear the paper. God will forget the errors that we

make unknowingly. The biggest transgression is to repeat something that we know is wrong. That is something we must not do."

Devotee: "Amma, do I deserve to pray to God? Do I have the purity of mind for that?" Mother: "Don't think hke that, son. Don't think that you lack the mental purity to pray because you have made a lot of mistakes in your life, or that you will pray only when your mind becomes pure. If you think you will bathe in the sea only after the waves subside, you will never be able to bathe. You can't learn to swim by sitting at the side of the pool. You have to get into the water. What will happen if the doctor tells the patient to come to him only after he gets well? God is the one who purifies our minds. That is why we take refuge in Him. Only through Him can we be cleansed."

Surendran: "Amma, once we believe in you, and have real devotion towards you, we can't do anything wrong. Therefore, we ask only for your grace that we may be given faith and devotion."

Mother: "Children, it is enough if you have faith in God. If you have firm faith in Him, you will not make mistakes. There will be only happiness in your lives."

Surendran: "Aren't you God yourself, Amma?"

Mother: "Amma does not like to say that. Suppose a fragrant flower blossoms on a plant. The plant shouldn't exclaim, 'Look at my flower! How beautiful it is! And what a wonderful fragrance? That comes from my power.' If it says so, it is feeding the ego. All powers belong to God. We should never think that anything is ours. None of this is due to Amma's power. She blossomed because of His power. He made Her fragrant. Amma will not say that any of this is Hers."

THE CAUSE OF SORROW, AND THE REMEDY

A devotee: "Amma, what is the reason for sorrow?" Mother: "The attitude of I and 'mine' is the reason for all sorrow.

"Once we were coming back from Kozhikode. On the bus was a householder and his child. He sat in his seat, playing with the child. After a while, the father fell asleep, and the child also fell asleep on his father's lap. A little later, the child slipped and fell on the floor. At first the father didn't know this, for he woke up only when the child began to cry. Then he too began to weep, saying, 'O my son, my son!' He started looking for possible signs of injury to the child. Hence, his attitude of I and 'mine' turned into sorrow as soon as he woke up. If that attitude is absent, there is no sorrow.

"Two young boys were playing with a stick. A third child saw this and started crying because he also wanted one. When he made a lot of fuss, his mother came and took the stick from the other boys and gave it to him. He started playing with it, but soon he fell asleep. The stick slipped from his hand, but he was totally oblivious to this. He had cried for it only a little while earlier, but in his sleep, he lost the attitude of I and 'mine.' That made him calm, and he could sleep peacefully, forgetting everything. Similarly, Brahman abiding within Brahman that is bliss. If we give up the attitude of I and 'mine,' we can enjoy that bliss. Then there is no more sorrow. But we do have to give up the attitude of I as an individual."

Devotee: "Amma, is it that easy for everyone?"

Mother: "Try, my son! We may not be able to climb a mountain, but can't we at least pick up a handful of sand from it? If we remove a handful of water from the ocean, there will be that much less remaining. Just think of it that way. Also, if you have complete dedication and put forth constant effort, nothing is impossible. If you keep pouring water into a bottle of ink, the color slowly fades until finally you can't tell whether there was any ink at all to begin with. In the same way, as the mind expands with the constant remembrance of God, the sense of individuality slowly dissolves and finally disappears. The individual mind becomes the universal mind."

Another devotee: "Amma, many people hate me just because I have money. Is it wrong to be wealthy?"

Mother: "Children, there is nothing wrong with having money. But the purpose of life isn't just to amass money. You may save money for your needs, but not in excess.

"Once there was an umbrella maker in a village. As he worked, he chanted God's name and engaged in satsang with those who came to him. He lived happily, content with what he earned, and everyone liked him. He earned enough to meet his daily needs.

"One day a land owner bought an umbrella from him. Pleased with the high quality and moderate price of the umbrella, the land owner took a special interest in the umbrella maker, whose good qualities attracted him. The land owner gave him some money as a gift. As soon as he got the money, the umbrella maker's character changed. His mind no longer stayed on the job, for he began to worry, 'How will I protect the money? Is it safe to keep it at home? Or will it get stolen?' As these thoughts about his money arose, the japa stopped. He couldn't finish his work on time, for his thoughts were on future plans: 'Should I build a house or should I start a larger business?' These were his only thoughts, and because of this he didn't pay attention to his work.

"He no longer liked to talk to others because he had forgotten how to speak with love. Whenever anyone asked him anything, he would get annoyed, for it disturbed his thoughts. As fewer and fewer people came to his store, his income plummeted. The thoughts about money robbed his peace of mind. As his greed and selfishness increased, he became restless and depressed. Soon the money he had received as a gift was all gone. He had no more work. The man who had once led a contented life before he received the money, now had only torment.

"Children, when we go to excess in anything, it will bring an end to peace. Therefore, always try to lead a simple life. That alone is enough to bring us mental peace. We don't need anything in excess."

Mother uses a simple style to remove the doubts of Her children. Yet they yearn to hear again and again those nectarine words, which impart knowledge through everyday stories and examples containing priceless gems of wisdom. They pray, as Arjuna prayed to Krishna, "I have not heard enough of this nectar. Please let me hear more and more!"

CHAPTER THREE

Wednesday, August 7, 1985

Mother sat facing the Arabian Sea, on the bank of the canal that ran at the edge of the ashram. All the brahmacharis came and sat around Her for meditation. The atmosphere was peaceful and solemn, making the mind naturally introspective. Even the waves in the ocean to the west seemed to have quieted down. Everyone tried to meditate. Mother cast Her compassionate glance at everyone and slowly began to speak.

MEDITATION

"Children, when you sit for meditation, do not think that you can still your mind immediately. At first, you should relax all parts of your body. Loosen your clothes if they are too tight. Make sure that the spine is erect. Then close your eyes and concentrate your mind on your breath. You should be aware of your inhalation and exhalation. Normally we breath in and out without being aware of it, but it should not be like that; we should become aware of the process. Then the mind will be wakeful.

"As you sit like that for a while, your mind will become calm. You can continue the meditation by focusing attention on your breath. Or you can start meditating on the form of your beloved deity. If the mind wanders, you should bring it back. If you are unable to do that, then it is enough to watch where it is going. The mind should be kept under observation. Then it will stop running around and will be under your control.

"Start meditating now, children."

SHE WHO REMOVES ALL DANGERS

All the brahmacharis became engrossed in meditation. Before long, however, Mother abruptly came out of Her meditation. Seeing the unusual change in Her mood, a brahmachari asked Her about it.

Mother: "Something has happened to one of the children." She paused for a while. Then She continued, "That son who comes regularly from Kozhencheri, it was he that Amma saw. Amma told him when he was here last week that he should be careful while traveling in vehicles. She specifically told him to refrain from driving any vehicle for three months."

Mother appeared particularly worried. She quickly returned to Her room.

Mother's words reminded Haridas, a devotee from Pattambi, of what had happened to him a year ago. He described the incident to the others. "I used to come with my family in my jeep to see Mother. One day when I was here, She told me, 'Don't drive for some time, son. Amma sees darkness ahead!' So, on the return trip, I made my brother drive the jeep. Two months later, my brother and I went to Sultan Battery to visit a friend. When we got there, my brother developed some stomach trouble. He was not in a position to drive or even travel. I had to be back home by the next morning because of some financial matters; so I couldn't stay there. Leaving my brother at my friend's home, I left that same night.

"Since I remembered Mother's words, I was driving slowly and very carefully, while chanting my mantra. On the way, I felt sleepy. Stopping for a cup of tea, I washed my face with cold water and then continued my journey. But after driving a little bit, I felt sleepy again. I struggled to stay awake as I drove on. Finally, I dozed off for a moment. The jeep went out of control and swerved to the right.

"Suddenly I felt that someone grabbed the steering wheel and turned it to the left. That same instant I called out, 'Amma!' and applied the brakes. The jeep came to a stop, almost touching a big rock on the left side of the road. In the darkness it was not possible to see anything

clearly. The road was built on the side of a mountain the rising mountain to the left, and to the right, the edge of the road dropped down steeply into a deep valley. It was only when I saw that the jeep had stopped close to the edge on the left side of the road, that I was convinced that the help of the unseen rescuer was not just my imagination.

"I came to the ashram a week later. As soon as She saw me, Mother asked, 'Son, did you drive, even though Amma told you not to?' I could only stand there with tears in my eyes.

Mother protects Her children, just like a mother who guards her babies, holding them in her arms, never putting them down. Mother is aware of her children's every thought, and of every breath they take.

IS THE FUTURE PREDESTINED?

Mother came down from Her room after the bhajans were over. A family from Bhopal had come to see Her. They were on vacation and were visiting their hometown in Kerala, where they had heard about Mother. They wanted to see Her before returning to Bhopal the following week. The husband had absorbed the spiritual principles from his father, who was a firm devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. His wife and children also had deep faith in God. They always found time for sadhana in the midst of their busy lives. They were planning to return home after getting Mother's darshan that night. As they had their own car, going back late at night was no problem.

When he had a chance to speak to Mother, the husband said: "Amma, the troubles in my life have increased a lot recently. My wife was in the hospital for a month. When she came home, our son fell ill, and he had to spend a week in the hospital. My wife says that our troubles will disappear if we get our horoscopes examined and do whatever remedies are suggested."

Mother: "Is there someone near you who can study your horoscopes?"

Husband: "My wife's father knows astrology. She makes a fuss about this every day. She wants to send everybody's horoscope to him. I myself have no faith at all in horoscopes and such things. We have to go through whatever is destined to happen, so why go through all that?"

Mother: "It is not right to say that there is no meaning in all this. We can know our future to some extent by studying the planetary positions. If we know the path ahead of us, we can avoid troubles. Isn't it true that we can avoid a thorny fence or a ditch on the way ahead, if we know that they are there?"

Husband: "Can we change destiny, then?"

Mother: "Destiny can be changed through tapas and sadhana. Even death can be averted. Don't you know the story of the sage, Markandeya? Didn't his fate change, as his heart cried out in prayer when he faced death? Anything in our fate can be transcended by performing actions with an attitude of total surrender to God. But we have to be ready to act, instead of just sitting somewhere, idly blaming fate. It is a sign of laziness to blame fate without doing any work." Husband: "Then the horoscope that foretells the future would turn out to be wrong, wouldn't it?"

Mother: "One's effort will surely make a difference. Amma will tell you a story. Two friends had their horoscopes cast. According to their horoscopes, both of them were going to be killed by a snakebite. One of them began to worry constantly about this. His anxiety made him mentally ill, causing his family to lose their peace of mind. The other man did not fall prey to anxiety. Instead, he thought about possible solutions. Becoming aware of the limits of his abilities to avert his death, he turned to God. He surrendered himself to God. But even so, using the healthy body and intelligence that God had given him, he took all the precautions he could to avoid being bitten by a snake. He stayed at home, always remembering God.

"One night, as he went into his puja room in the dark, his foot accidentally hit something. In the room, there was a deity in the form of a snake with its tongue protruding. This was what his foot had touched, and it happened at the hour the horoscope said he was supposed to be bitten by a snake. Even though it was a lifeless snake, he was injured, but there was no poison. The effort he made with dedication to God became fruitful. His friend, however, became a victim of anxiety

before anything had happened, and so he wasted his life. Lead a life of self-effort, son, without blaming fate. All obstacles can be overcome that way."

Husband: "Amma, I have a question." Mother: "What is it, son."

Husband: "If fate could be changed, couldn't Sri Krishna have changed Duryodhana's mind and avoided the war? Would Duryodhana have gone to war if Krishna had revealed his divine form to him?"

Mother: "The Lord showed His supreme form to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Because of his humihty, Arjuna could recognize the Lord's greatness, but the egoistic Duryodhana could not. It is no use showing anything to those who don't have an attitude of surrender. The spiritual principles can be imparted only to someone who deserves it, and who is of the right disposition. Glorification of the body was what Duryodhana considered important. He didn't have the attitude to absorb the Lord's advice. His view was that whatever Krishna said was not at all for his good, but was only meant to help the Pandavas. Whatever Krishna told him, he would take in the opposite sense. Only through war can the egos of such people be destroyed."

The Holy Mother's face took on a serious expression. Suddenly She got up. Her thoughts had shifted to something else. The family prostrated and withdrew. Mother went to the coconut grove and walked among the trees. She was singing the lines of a bhajan in a low voice. Soon She raised both Her arms towards the sky and sang the same verse again and again with great feeling, Her voice breaking and faltering.

After a while. Mother sat down in the sand, and bent Her face towards the ground. Was She shedding tears for Her children? No one dared to break Her solitude. Everyone slipped quietly away. Mother lay down in the sand and remained in that position for several hours. Man's feeble mind retreats in defeat when it tries to understand the unfathomable nature of Mother's actions. Total surrender is the only course left.

Saturday, August 10, 1985

The day was just breaking. During the night, a middle-aged man had arrived at the ashram, too drunk to walk properly. Two young men were now haggling with him for the money he owed them. He had hired their auto-rickshaw at night to come to the ashram. Along the way, he had stopped at all the liquor shops. By the time they reached the ashram, he had no money left. They were asking for sixty rupees. He only had a few coins. Finally, he gave them his expensive watch and sent them away.

He walked with unsteady steps. The brahmacharis helped him to the verandah of the Vedanta school and made him lie down. Following a devotee's advice, he drank some buttermilk. Someone helped him to change his clothes.

On this day there was going to be a program of archana and bhajans in Mother s divine presence at the ashram center at Kollam. At eight o'clock in the morning, Mother came down from Her room, ready to start the journey. The man who had been drunk when he arrived now ran towards Mother. He had taken a bath and had covered himself with sacred ash. He prostrated fully in front of Mother and recited aloud hymns to the Divine Mother. He also told Mother about his troubles. Even though She knew about his drinking, She consoled him with tender motherly love. She said, "Amma will return tonight. Stay here tonight, son. You can go back after bhava darshan tomorrow."

Some devotees were also going on the trip to Kollam with Mother and the brahmacharis. She got into the large canoe that served as a ferry across the backwaters. Anxious to be with Her, everyone got into the same boat, but there were too many people. Mother, who does not like to see any of Her children unhappy, did not ask anyone to get out. If the canoe tipped, a Httle water would flow in. If a motor boat were to pass by, the canoe could certainly sink in its wake. But everyone was very confident that nothing untoward would happen since Mother was with them.

"Children, there are some people here who don't know how to swim. So, everyone, be very careful. If you rock the boat, it will go down," She said gravely. Gently, the boat glided away from the shore.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Mother said: "Children, the spiritual journey is just like this trip. We have to sit with self-control, even holding our breath, until we reach the other shore. The boat may sink if we don't have that kind of control. In the same way, until we reach the other shore of the ocean of samsara until we attain purnam (completeness), we have to take each step very carefully. Once we reach there, there are no more worries."

Mother sat on the wooden seat in the boat with Her eyes cast on the water. When Mother is with Her

The cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

children, holding their hands firmly, what is there to be afraid of? No one was worried.

Upon reaching the other side, everybody boarded the bus. During the trip, Br. Venu said to Mother:

"Recently a devotee told me that he had no faith in some mahatmas, because they live in the midst of wealth, even accumulating millions."

Mother: "We cannot judge them on such grounds. Look at all the ornaments adorning the deities in the temples. Do we blame God for all that? People do not consider all the good actions of the mahatmas."

Venu: "He has some complaints about you too, Amma. He thinks that Amma ignores women."

Mother (laughing): "Oh, is that so?"

Venu: "Even though Amma is a woman, he complains that there are not too many brahmacharinis here."

Mother: "Would Amma, who has wished to do tapas to remove the weakness of women, now ignore women? For a life of sannyasa, one needs a good amount of purushatwam (the "masculine" principle). Only girls with goodpurushatwam qualities, such as self-reliance and strength of mind, should be accepted into ashrams. Otherwise, they will only end up doing more harm than good, even though they have come with the hope of helping the world. If boys err, the world won't blame them so much; even if they leave the ashram, they can find some work and earn a livelihood. But (in India) it is different with girls. The girls have to be very careful. They need the ability to support themselves, if they should happen to find that they are ill-suited for ashram life. That is why Amma insists that all the girls here should continue their education.

"Girls have to be self-reliant. They are by nature compassionate, and they form attachments easily. Because of this they come to suffer, and they get cheated. They will be saved, however, if their tendency to form a bond with everything is turned towards God. If a woman has the dispassion of a man, the result will be that she acquires the power of ten men."

Br. Pai: "Amma, which is more valuable, selfless action or meditation?"

Mother: "Children, what do you think?"

Everyone gave their opinion. It ended in a heated debate. Mother enjoyed it, listening with a smile on Her face. Finally, everyone became quiet and looked at Her. "Amma, please tell us, yourself."

When their insistence grew stronger, Mother said: "You need both. Tapas alone is not enough; you need action also. Soap alone is not enough to wash your clothes; you need to 'agitate' or beat the clothes clean. To overcome the circumstances, karma (action) is essential. We should be able to remember God constantly, whatever we are doing, and not just when we sit for meditation. Further, selfless action will help develop the purity needed for meditation. Action is also necessary to test the progress we have made in meditation. On the other hand, without meditation,selfless action is not possible. The actions of a man who does tapas have a power of their own; they benefit every-one.

That evening, Dr. Sudhamsu Chaturvedi, a college professor, arrived at the ashram to see Mother. He was born in Uttar Pradesh, in the north, but had been living in Kerala for many years. He spoke Malayalam fluently, and as he was waiting for Mother to return from Her trip, he debated with the brahmacharis on many topics. In his opinion, the most important thing was scriptural study.

Finally Mother returned from KoUam. She went and sat down in the south-eastern corner of the kalari. Sudhamsu prostrated and sat down next to Her. Without any introduction. Mother started to speak.

Mother: "Son, you travel frequently. When you are at the station, how do you know the schedule of the trains or buses?"

Sudhamsu: "I would ask at the counter, or look at the schedule posted at the station."

Mother: "Having read the sign that tells you which bus goes where and when, will you stand there looking at the sign, or will you find the bus and board it?"

Sudhamsu: "When I get the information, of course I will get on the bus and travel. That's the only way I can reach my destination."

Mother: "In the same way, the scriptures only point the way. If you just sit and read the scriptures, you will not reach your goal. When you wanted to come here, you found the appropriate bus and got on it. That is how you were able to reach here. Similarly, only by actually doing the sadhana described in the texts will you achieve any spiritual experience. By eating the picture of a banana, you won't get the taste or the nourishment of the fruit. Scriptural study is necessary, but, at the same time, you have to do sadhana to get the benefit."

The professor was stunned by the fact that Mother knew exactly what he and the brahmacharis had been discussing just before She came. He paused for a while, and then asked another question.

Sudhamsu: "If Christ was really a mahatma, couldn't he have prevented his enemies from crucifying him?"

Mother: "Christ sacrificed himself to teach others the greatness of sacrifice and forgiveness. The mahatmas can remove their own suffering in an instant if they wish. But what they desire is to set an example for the whole world, even if it means their own suffering. No one can do anything to the mahatmas. You can't even approach them without their consent. No one can oppose them if they resolve against it. They willingly undergo suffering to teach the world how to face opposing forces and adverse circumstances."

Sudhamsu raised a different question: "How did all these brahmacharis come to be here as permanent residents?".

Mother: "When a flower blossoms, there is no need to send out a special invitation to anyone to come and enjoy the nectar. The bee will arrive on its own. These children had a spiritual samskara (disposition) to begin with. Meeting Amma awakened it, that's all. Don't you recall a forgotten song in its entirety when you hear the first line? These children were ready to lead a life in accordance with the samskara that was already within them. Amma is just guiding them, that's all."

Sudhamsu: "I have been practicing japa and meditation for a long time, but there is not enough progress."

Mother: "You should also love God. Without love, no amount of japa and meditation will bear fruit. When your love for God becomes very strong, all the bad vasanas within you will automatically drop away. Rowing a boat against the current is difficult, but if there is a sail, it becomes easy. Love for God is like a sail that helps the boat go forward.

"When two lovers are sitting together, they won't like it if anyone comes near them. A real sadhak has the same attitude. He doesn't like anything that isn't related to God. Living with the thought of God always in his mind, he can't bear any obstacles that come between himself and God. Compared to his love for God, everything else is worthless to him.

"Son, one should have true lakshya bodha (intent on the goal). Only then can one's sadhana become deep. When someone sets out with a strong desire to reach a certain place, no obstacle can stop him. If he misses the bus, he will take a taxi. But if he lacks interest, he may decide to go home if he misses the bus, thinking he can try again the next day. Children, without intensity in sadhana, it is difficult to reach the goal.

"Before you sow the seed, you have to prepare the land, clearing it of grass and weeds. Otherwise, it is difficult for the seeds to sprout. In the same way, we can enjoy the bliss of the Self only if we clear the mind of all external things and direct it to God.

"Did you eat, son? Amma forgot all about that in the midst of the conversation."

"Yes, Amma."

The conversation turned to the personal problems of the devotees. Their hearts, burning in the heat of samsara, were cooled by the nectar of Mother's love.

Monday, August 12, 1985

The bhava darshan had ended late the previous night. But when the darshan was over. Mother continued talking with and consoling the devotees. She tried especially hard to comfort a woman who had been coming to see Mother for a year.

Before she had met Mother, her daughter had been in the hospital with cancer. Many different treatments had been tried, but they all proved to be in vain. She had been in a state of extreme distress, mentally and physically. She had also been facing financial ruin because of the situation. Hearing about Mother from a friend, the woman had come to see Mother, who gave her sacred ash to give to her ailing daughter. Soon after taking the ash, the daughter began to recover. Her pain disappeared, and she felt strong enough to face anything.

The doctors, who had given up, believing that her case was hopeless, were astonished by this. Soon, the young woman was released from the hospital. After her release, both she and her mother came to see Mother several times, but during their last visit. Mother had indicated that an operation would soon be needed. A week later, the daughter s condition worsened, and she was readmitted to the hospital. The doctors recommended another operation, which was to take place in two days. Now, the mother had come to receive Mother s blessings before the operation. She was returning home early in the morning, so Mother arranged for her to travel with a family of devotees who had come from Trissur.

Soon Mother was ready to go back to Her room, the crows had begun to caw announcing the arrival of another day.

It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that Mother came down to the darshan hut. Being the day after the bhava darshan, the crowd of devotees was relatively small. A brahmachari was meditating in the hut. Upon seeing Mother, he prostrated before Her, and took the opportunity to ask Mother a question before the devotees arrived:

"Amma, what is the relation between karma and rebirth? It is said that rebirth is caused by karma."

Mother: "Son, there is an aura around our bodies. Just as our words may be recorded on tape, our actions leave their impression on this aura. The aura becomes golden if the actions are good. Whatever such people set out to do, the obstacles are eliminated and everything turns out auspiciously. But the aura of those who do evil deeds becomes dark. Such people are never free of obstacles and problems. Their auras remain on earth after their death, becoming food for worms and insects, and they are then reborn here."

When the devotees started arriving for darshan, the brahmachari prostrated again and got up.

Mother began inquiring about the welfare of the devotees. One of them offered a gift packet wrapped in brightly colored paper at Her feet.

Mother: "Mone, how is your son doing?"

Devotee: "By your grace, Amma, he got his job back. There was a letter from his wife just the other day, stating that he has stopped smoking ganja. He is well-behaved, and he talks only about you. He even sent his first pay check to me, and asked me to give you all the news and to get your blessings. That is why I came today."

Mother: "Amma is happy just to know that he has stopped smoking ganja. Son, tell him that Amma is pleased more by the change in his behavior than by the present he has sent."

The devotee's son worked in Bhilai. He had lost his job when he started smoking ganja excessively, and he had had to spend a year back home in Kerala without a job. During that time

he came to see Mother. Amma's heart had melted on seeing his sincere desire to free himself from his bad habit. She had given him some musk pills with Her blessing, and told him to take a pill every time he had the urge to smoke ganja. He was able to reduce the smoking gradually and finally stop it completely. It had been a few months since he had unexpectedly got his old job back.

The devotee continued: "All the pills Amma gave him were used up before he left home. Now he keeps some musk in his pocket. He says just its smell is enough."

Mother: "That is because of his faith. If there is faith, not only musk, but even stones will give results."

Amma will not claim that anything happens due to Her powers. She who resides in the Supreme teaches through Her own actions what total surrender to the Divine means.

Saturday, August 24, 1985

On Friday Mother arrived in Kodungalloor to attend the evening bhajans at the Devi temple. Those traveling with Mother spent the night at the home of a devotee. In the morning the brahmacharis performed the Lalita Sahasranama archana and Mother did the arati with camphor. After visiting the homes of three more devotees, Mother and her party began the return trip to the ashram.

At lunch time they stopped by the roadside. Lunch for everybody had been packed by the family that had hosted them the previous night. All sat in a circle as Mother served the food on banana leaves. After reciting the fifteenth chapter of the Gita they chanted 'brahmarpanam and ate their lunch. Someone obtained a container from a nearby house and fetched water from a tap for everyone to wash their hands. The people who watched this scene might have wondered who these nomads were and where they came from. Mother travels around the country with no thought of food or sleep, shedding the light of eternal peace on the path of Her children floundering in ignorance. When She comes running to comfort Her children, who are deluded by Maya, and to give them everything She has, how can they know of Her own supreme sacrifice?

CLEARING THE DOUBTS OF THE BRAHMACHARIS

The traveling party did not rest after lunch, so the journey continued. Br. Venu had a severe earache, which had started the night before, making it impossible for him to sleep. Mother had him sit next to Her in the van, and She asked the others sitting nearby to move so that Venu could He down. She put his head in Her lap and comforted him. "This earache came because you forcefully held your breath doing pranayama," Amma told him.

Venu: "Are you saying it is wrong to do pranayama?"

Mother: "No, it is not wrong. But you children don't have the patience to do it properly. In the old days, people were healthy and had patience. They were able to practice these things properly. These days people have neither health nor patience. It is very dangerous to practice pranayama without the direct supervision of a guru."

Because of the crowd of devotees at the ashram, the brahmacharis rarely had the chance to speak with Mother about spiritual matters. Only when they travelled with Her, did everyone get to sit near Her and listen to Her divine words.

A brahmachari: "Amma, who is greater, God or the guru?"

Mother: "In principle, God and the guru are the same. But we may say that the guru is higher than God. The guru's grace is something unique. If the guru wants, he can remove the effect of God's displeasure. But even God cannot remove the sin that comes from dishonouring the guru. When you realize God, you can say that you and God are the same. But even then, you cannot say that you are the same as the guru. It is the guru who initiated the disciple with the mantra that led to Self-realization. It is the path shown by the guru that led the disciple to the goal. The guru will always have that special status. Even after realizing the Truth, the disciple will stand before the guru with great humility."

Br: "Amma, how many times do we have to chant the mantra given by you to achieve mantra siddhi

Mother: "What is important is not how many times you chant it, but how you chant it. Even if you chant it millions of times, how can you receive any benefit from the mantra, if, at the same time, you lead a heedless life, a life without shraddha? How many times a mantra should be chanted depends on how long it is. Japa should be done with one-pointedness. When japa is done with utmost concentration, the number of times it is chanted is unimportant. Even a relatively small number will lead to mantra siddhi.

"One must have concentration on the sound or form of the mantra. While chanting, you can also focus on each letter of the mantra separately. You will not always get one-pointedness. That is why it is said that one should chant it crores of times (a crore is ten million). The more you chant, the more one-pointedness you get.

"Asking how many times one should chant the mantra is like asking how much water should be given to a plant for it to yield fruit. Watering is required, but the amount of water depends on the nature of the plant, the climate, the quality of the soil, and so on. Water alone is not enough. The plant needs sunlight, fertilizer, air, and protection from pests as well. Similarly, on the spiritual path, chanting the mantra is only one facet. Good deeds, good thoughts, and association with virtuous people (satsang) are also necessary. When all these are present, then one gets the benefit according to God's will."

Br: "Can one achieve siddhis through chanting the mantra?"

Mother: "Siddhis depend on your focus. Japa can lead to siddhis. However, if one uses such siddhis indiscriminately, one will slip from the path that leads to the ultimate goal. Don't think that you can lead any type of life once you have been initiated with a mantra. Amma is watching you. Suppose you are traveling by bus. You have bought a ticket, but when the inspector comes to check your ticket and you don't have it, you will be asked to get off the bus. There is no leniency.

"Once you attain Self-realization, you have all the siddhis. Realization is beyond all siddhis. Once you have attained realization, the whole world is in your hands. If, instead of wanting realization, you ask God for siddhis, it is like struggling to reach the royal court, and when you finally come before the king, you ask for a couple of gooseberries."

Br: "How long will it take to get the vision of God?"

Mother: "We cannot predict when we will see God. It depends on the yearning of the seeker and the effort put forth. If we travel in an ordinary bus, we cannot be sure when we will reach our destination, since the bus stops at many points along the way. An express bus, on the other hand, stops only at a limited number of places, so we can predict its arrival time more or less accurately. Similarly, if we think of God without wasting even a moment, and move forward with total detachment, we can reach the goal in a short time. If there is no intensity in our sadhana, it is not easy to say when we will reach there.

The scriptures sometimes say that it doesn't take even an instant to attain God-realization. Yet in other places, it is said to be difficult to achieve realization even in a hundred births. The intensity of the sadhana, and the samskara achieved in previous lives, determine the time needed to reach the goal. Sadhana doesn't mean just sitting somewhere with our eyes closed; we need constant awareness of the goal and ceaseless effort. Above all, we need purity of heart. Once our heart is pure, it is easy to get God's grace."

Br: "Amma, does a vision of God mean the same thing as God-realization?"

Mother: "Some people get certain visions during meditation. In meditation there is a state that is neither sleep nor the waking state; it may be called the dream state of meditation. It is in such a state that one usually gets visions of various divine forms. We cannot call these visions of God, nor should we be enamoured by them. Instead, we should go forward."

Two brahmacharis sitting at the back of the bus were not listening to Mother. They were engaged in an argument about a passage in the Upanishad they were studying at the time. Frequently they looked at Mother to see whether She was listening to them. Finally, She stopped what She was saying and turned to them.

Mother: "Children, don't waste your time trying to decide whether the fruit on the tree is fully ripe, or if it just looks ripe, or whether it may be infested. Get up there and pick the fruit! Don't waste your time arguing about this and that. Chant your mantra constantly. If you want spiritual progress, you need to make constant effort. There is no shortcut."

EXPERIENCES THAT EVOKE WONDER

Br. Venu's earache was gone by this time, either because of Mother s magic touch, or because he was drinking in the nectar of Her words. When the van reached Alleppy, it suddenly stopped and refused to move any further. Br. Ramakrishnan, who was driving, became worried as he could not find any reason for the van stalling. He looked at Mother helplessly. She did not say anything, but got out of the van with a smile and started walking. The brahmacharis walked with Her. Br. Ramakrishnan also followed Her, asking Her whether he should call someone to repair the van, or rent another vehicle if there was a delay. Mother, however, did not utter a word in reply. Her devotee, Shekhar, lived close to the place where the van had stopped, and She went directly to his house.

The members of that family were overjoyed when they saw Mother. They had long hoped that Mother would visit their home. Being aware that this was the day She would be returning from Kodungalloor, they had prayed that Mother would visit them that day. In fact, they were talking about the possibility, and someone was expressing a doubt whether Mother would come without an invitation, when suddenly Mother walked right in. They could hardly believe their eyes. They welcomed Her respectfully and led Her to the puja room, where She did the arati with camphor. Then She called each member of the family to Her and removed their pain with the salve of Her sweet words.

Mother soon emerged from the house. Ramakrishnan was standing there, brooding in silence. As Mother began walking back to the van without a word, Ramakrishnan gently told Her, "Amma, the van has not been repaired yet." Getting into the van and sitting down. She said, "Try to start it again, son." Ramakrishnan started the van and it moved forward without a problem. He looked back at Mother with a beaming face, and She just smiled.

By the time they had visited the homes of two more devotees along the way, it was seven-thirty when they reached the ashram. Evening bhajans were going on. Br. Anish, a student at the Chinmaya Mission in Bombay, was waiting to see Mother. This was his first visit here and his first darshan with Mother. Sitting down in the courtyard between the Vedanta school and the kalari. Mother talked to Anish for a while. The brahmacharis who had accompanied Mother on the trip joined the bhajans in the kalari. Finally, Anish also went in. Enraptured by the bhajans, he stood there forgetting everything else. To him, the song they were singing seemed to tell the story of his own life:

Akalatta koviliL..
In a distant temple, a wick was constantly burning.
Guiding those who are groping in the dark.
In this way. Mother was showing Her compassion.
One day when I was wandering along that path.
The Radiant One beckoned me with Her hand;
She opened the sacred door Took some holy ash And rubbed it on my forehead. She sang the songs of God and made a place for me to sleep With Her own hands, A novel kind of dream then came to me Declaring the truth: Why do you weep Don t you know that you have reached the sacred feet of God?
I awoke with a sigh

And I clearly saw the Lotus Face, I saw it so clearly.

Thursday, September 5, 1985

THE TIRELESS MOTHER

A group of devotees arrived after midnight. Though they had started from Kollam in the evening, their car had problems along the way, and it took a long time getting it repaired. They had thought

of returning home since it was so late, but proceeded to the ashram anyway due to the insistence of one of the children. They had not expected to see Mother during the night at all, but as they approached, they found Mother standing alone in the coconut grove in front of the ashram, as if expecting someone. All thoughts of their problems dissolved the instant they saw Her. Mother sat down and talked to them until four o'clock in the morning.

Mother had a bath and came down again at five. A brahmachari who saw this begged Her to take some rest. She had not slept at all during the night. The coming night there would be bhava darshan; again She would miss sleep. Mother replied, "One should not sleep when archana is going on. We are doing all this with a divine sankalpa. Everyone should be awake and doing the archana. Sleeping at such a time will lead to mishaps. If Amma sleeps during archana today, you will all do the same thing tomorrow. There won't be any discipline at the ashram."

Br: "But, Amma, if you don't get any rest, won't it affect your health?"

Mother: "God will take care of all that. Amma has not come to take care of this body. If you follow the rules regularly, nothing will happen to Amma's health."

Knowing that further insistence was useless, the brahmachari withdrew. Mother went to the meditation room and joined the brahmacharis in the archana. After the archana. She went to the coconut grove and sat down. Bri Gayatri brought Her a cup of tea. She drank half of it and gave the cup to Gayatri.

Mother called Br. Sarvatma Chaitanya, who normally lived in France, where he spent his time spreading Mother s teachings. He was here now to see Mother. Sarvatma came, prostrated, and sat down next to Her.

Sarvatma: "Amma, I know you did not sleep at all last night. That is why I didn't come to see you. Tonight, is bhava darshan again. You should rest at least for a little while. I will come to see you after that."

Mother: "Son, don't you have to go back? You needn't worry about Amma's comfort. She doesn't sleep most nights. Where is the time to sleep during the nights of bhava darshan? On other nights, Amma reads letters, and it is very late when She finishes.

"Staying up all night has become a habit with Amma. It didn't start recently; Amma has been like this since Her childhood. She wouldn't sleep because of the grief of not having seen God yet. If She felt sleepy, She would inflict wounds on Her own body to stay awake. She would be busy with household chores throughout the day, and by the time She finished cleaning the dishes at night, the others would be fast asleep. It was not until then that She would get a little time to pray undisturbed. She used to stay up all night crying for the Lord.

"Night is the best time to pray. Nature is quiet. No one will disturb you. No one will even know if you go to the seashore, and you can sit there in solitude."

Tears welled up in Sarvatma's eyes as he thought about Mother's sacrifice and intense tapas. Mother changed the subject and asked him: "Son, what did you say you wanted

to ask Amma?" Sarvatma could not speak, but just sat silently looking into Her eyes.

EXPLANATION OF MISSION WORK

Mother said to Br. Gayatri, who was standing nearby: "This son went to many places to give talks. At some places there were plenty of listeners, but at other locations there were very few. He began to worry when the crowd was small. He though that perhaps the people weren't coming because his speeches were no good. (Turning to Sarvatma) Son, why should you worry about how many people come to hear you? Aren't you doing what Amma asked you to do? Be careful about one thing only: show great humility in your words and deeds. We should go down to the level of the people and bring them up.

"Children are interested in playing. They won't even come inside to eat on time. It is the mother's job to feed her child at the right time, but shouting at him or spanking him won't work. She needs to call him with love; she must talk to him at his level. Then he will come and eat. In the same way, people may not take to spiritual ideas instantly, so we have to make them interested. Everyone appreciates being approached with humihty. Everyone yearns for love. We should approach each person at his level and then uplift him."

Sarvatma: "Some people ask whether it is appropriate to form organizations in the name of mahatmas."

Mother: "Son, you may avoid an individuals name, but if you form a movement of some sort, it will have to have a name in the end. For instance, take some ideal instead of an individual's name. Let it be the Path of Love, or the Path of the Atman. Whatever it is, it has to have a label. Then there will be some followers, and it will become a group or an organization. It will be known as an organization that stands for, for example, love or sacrifice. After a while, there will be the picture of the person who started it, and in the end it will be known after that individual, or perhaps a few individuals.

"We need some sort of instrument in order to transform the human mind, which is selfish, and make it expansive. We have to tie the mind to some ideal. It is like putting a wild horse in a pen and taming it. Some people go to a satguru for this. The guru's name symbolizes the ideals he teaches through the example of his own life. Others may adopt some other method. If you avoid the framework of an organization, it is difficult to bring the teachings to the people. Why should we forego the great service of an organization just because of some minor defects?

"You may ask why there is a fence around a farm patch, but the fence clearly serves a purpose. Whatever you start, there will be some limitations. Do not worry about them. Try to see only the good in everything. Teach people to do the same thing. It is said that if you give a swan a mixture of milk and water, it can extract just the milk from it. View everything with a broad mind. Take only what is good.

Lead your life with an awareness of what is transient and what is eternal.

"In certain parts of India, one uses the first letter of the father's name as an initial in one's own name. Does the father gain anything from this? When an institution is founded, countless people come and benefit from it. A sannyasi does not live for himself; he lives to teach others the Supreme Principle. The disciples spread the teachings of their guru just for that purpose. Ashrams are also meant for this.

"Do not see the mahatmas as individuals. They stand for an ideal, for the ultimate principle. That is what we should look at. The guru is the principle of the Self that pervades the whole universe. He may appear to us as an individual. Those who live for their families, or who fulfil only their own desires, we may see as individuals; but are the mahatmas like that? No. They benefit the whole world. They bring peace to thousands of people.

"Son, most of us have grown up leaning on various individuals. Only a few people are able to grow up solely depending on the inner principles. In childhood, we depend on our parents. Later on, we rely on our friends or on our spouses. Subsequently, we learn to love and to serve only individuals. We are unable to live for the spiritual principles alone. The mahatmas, however, are beyond name and form, even though they do have names and forms. Even when you see them acting as individuals, there is no ego in them. There is no sense of an individual. If we rely on the mahatmas, we will progress very quickly, and our minds will become expansive."

Mother got up slowly, and Sarvatma Chaitanya prostrated to Her. After giving this son, who was going away, a kiss, Mother went to the hut to give darshan to the devotees.

In the space between the darshan hut and the Vedanta school, there were some flower pots with plants in bloom. Two brahmacharis were standing there enjoying the beauty of the flowers. Seeing Mother coming their way, they stepped aside. As Mother passed one of the pots which held a withering plant. She said to them, "One can see from this how alert you all are to external things. Would this plant have withered if you had any shraddha? Didn't it dry up because no one watered it on time? One can see out how much shraddha a brahmachari has towards the world by just looking at the plants around him. One who loves God will love all living things and care for them as needed,"

Mother went into the hut and started receiving the devotees.

UNNIYAPPAM

A female devotee had brought some unniyappam (a sweet snack made of rice flour and brown sugar, fried in oil) for the brahmacharis. She offered them to Mother.)

Mother: "Daughter, if you bring these children things like this, what is the use of their leaving home? They are here to practice renunciation. What will Amma do if someone brings food from the home of each brahmachari?

Woman: "Amma, we bring these things only once in a while. What harm can it do?"

Mother: "To give them the things they crave is to hurt them, daughter. That is not love. True love is to refrain from giving them food that pleases the palate. True love is to inspire them to control their palate and their mind, and to encourage them in that. One who has complete control over the mind, can always taste nectar. But when food passes down the throat, it turns into excreta. It is not possible to control the mind without controlling the palate. If these children crave the pampering of their parents and tasty food, what is the need of coming here? They have given up their home and their neighbourhood, and have come here with a different goal in mind."

The woman's eyes filled with tears. "Amma, I didn't know that I was committing such a grave error. I see everyone here as my children. I don't think of anything but their welfare."

Mother pulled the woman close to Her and hugged her.

Mother: "Daughter, Amma wasn't trying to make you unhappy. She was just trying to know your mind. Somebody here must have had a craving for unniyappam; that's why you brought it today!" Mother laughed and everyone in the hut joined Her. "Even though Amma says these things. She Herself sometimes makes tasty food for Her children here. She will think, 'How much comfort these children were accustomed to at home! Are they happy with the food here? Who else but Amma will make special treats for themnow?' So there are some days when Amma Herself makes special snacks for them.

"On some days, when She is thinking like this, some devotees will bring special treats. By God's grace, the children here have not felt the lack of anything. At other times, however, Amma's attitude will change, and She will give them just plain rice. There won't be anything to go with it. Sometimes, She will create circumstances in which the children will have to go hungry. After all, they have to get used to that as well. One shouldn't be a slave of the palate. If one foregoes the taste of the tongue, one can enjoy the taste of the heart."

Mother called Bri. Gayatri and entrusted her with the unniyappam to give to the ashram inmates. Gayatri had not heard the conversation that took place in the hut. She took the packet from Mother and whispered something in Her ear. Mother started laughing loudly, and everyone looked at Her face, wondering what was going on.

Mother: "Didn't Amma say that someone must have been craving some unniyappam? Apparently, one son told Gayatri about the times he had eaten it at home, and he was saying how nice it would be to taste it again." Everybody laughed.

The darshan lasted until two in the afternoon. Before returning to Her room. Mother went to the dining hall and made sure that everyone was well fed. At five o'clock. Mother would come down again for the evening bhajans.

which were to begin early, since it was a bhava darshan day.

Friday, September 6, 1985

Br. Neal Rosner was busy recording the daily activities of the ashram on video tape, using a video camera brought by a devotee from America the previous day. He had already filmed the Vedic chanting and the Sahasranama archana, which took place early in the morning. However, the recording was not very good, probably because Mother did not allow the use of any additional lighting.

"If you turn on bright lights during archana, everyone will lose their concentration," Mother told Nealu. "The mind should be focused fully on the chosen deity or on the mantra. The Divine Mother is present when we do the archana. The purpose of archana is to focus our minds. We should understand that." Mother constantly reminds us to concentrate totally on whatever we are doing at the moment.

Mother often says that spiritual seekers should not allow their pictures to be taken. "The light from the flash robs the seeker of some of his ojas (subtle energy)."

Initially, Mother didn't allow video recording, but Nealu had followed Her around the previous night, saying, "Amma, we get letters daily from abroad asking for a video tape of you.

There are so many of your children overseas who are unable to come here. Isn't this for them? In fact, they sent this camera. Please, just this one time, Amma..." Finally, Mother agreed. "All right, if you insist. But don't obstruct the children's meditation or anything. Also, don't stand in front of me holding that thing!" Nealu had to agree to these conditions.

Nealu stood behind a coconut tree, waiting for Mother to come to the darshan hut, but there was not enough light because of the trees, and Mother wouldn't allow extra lighting for picture taking. Mother finally came. She walked to the hut, brightening the shaded areas under the coconut trees. Nealu followed Her, enjoying the scene through the camera's eye.

THE RENUNCIATE AND RELATIVES

The biological mother of one of the brahmacharis was waiting to see Mother. Her daughter was also with her. The woman bowed to Mother and explained the reason for her sadness.

Woman (pointing to the brahmachari): "Amma, we are about to celebrate his father's birthday. Please let him come home for a couple of days."

Mother: "But Amma has not forbidden anyone to leave the ashram. Of course you can take him with you if he wants to go."

Woman: "He won't agree. He will obey only your words, Amma."

The brahmachari stood with his head bent down, as his mother and sister pleaded with Mother. Mother turned to him. "Son, won't you go with them?" He nodded halfheartedly. All three bowed to Her and went out of the darshan hut.

In the afternoon, Mother came out after the last of the devotees had gone, and was greeted by the hapless face of the brahmachari.

Mother: "You didn't go? Where are your mother and sister?"

Br: "They left. Somehow, I managed to send them away."

Mother: "Don't you want to go home for your father's birthday feast?"

Br: "No, Amma. I will be happy if you don't press me to go. My only sadness is that I didn't obey your words."

Mother had been on the way to Her room. Now She stopped. She wasn't smiling. Her face was serious, but also filled with love. Sitting down on the steps, while the brahmachari sat at Her feet. Mother looked straight into his eyes.

Mother: "Son, a brahmachari shouldn't maintain his ties with his family. That is like rowing a boat tied to a tree. He will not progress in his sadhana. It is the same way if your mind is filled with thoughts. It is like rowing a boat through water overgrown with seaweed. You may row a hundred times, but you will move only an inch.

"When you talk to the members of your family or read their letters, you are exposed to all the news about home and the neighbourhood. Then what meaning is there in saying that you have left home? Your mind will hover around your home and neighbourhood. With all those thoughts, how can you get any concentration? There will only be continuous waves of thoughts.

"In the beginning, seekers shouldn't even read the newspaper. When you read the paper, all the news of the world leaves their imprint on your mind. Some children read the newspaper and come and tell Amma all the news. Amma will pretend to be hearing everything, to examine their minds. The next day they come again with more news, but this is not what Amma expects from you. A brahmachari should have the attitude of total surrender to God. He should have the conviction that God will take care of his family. If there is that firm faith, God will indeed take good care of the family. Didn't Krishna himself come to the aid of Kurooramma?

"Son, if we pour water at the root of a tree, it will reach all the branches. But if we pour water on the branches, the tree does not get the benefit, and our effort is wasted. If we love God, it is equal to loving everyone. It benefits everyone, because the same God dwells within everyone. Through loving Him, we love all. Forming bonds only with individuals, however, just leads to sorrow.

"When we are just beginning to learn to drive, we should go to an empty lot and practice. Otherwise, we may be a danger to ourselves and to others. Once we have learned to drive well, we can handle the car easily, even in heavy

traffic. Likewise, a sadhak should stay away from family and friends in the beginning, and practice solitude. Otherwise, it will be difficult to bind the mind to God. But, as he progresses in his sadhana, he will be able to see everybody as God, and to love and serve them. His spiritual strength will not be wasted.

"Son, if you maintain your relations with the family, you will lose whatever strength you have. It is enough if you write a letter to your mother. Write only about spiritual matters. If you happen to go home, sleep only in the puja room, and if someone comes to tell you about family matters, don't lend them an ear. Talk only about spiritual things."

Mother's words set the brahmachari's heart at ease. He prostrated and left, and Mother went to Her room.

ON THE SEASHORE

At five-thirty in the evening. Mother came down from Her room and called all the brahmacharis to the seashore. When they reached the beach. Mother was already in deep meditation. Everyone sat around Her and closed their eyes. Mother s presence and the sound of the sea drowned out all thoughts of the external world.

After two hours. Mother opened Her eyes, got up, and started walking slowly along the beach. As She came close to the water, the ocean's waves seemed to compete to kiss Her feet; the fortunate few that succeeded dissolved back into the sea, fully content. Darkness descended, and Mother s white clothes now appeared to glow with a light of their own. Continuing to walk along the seashore, Mother began to sing softly, with Her eyes fixed on the horizon. She seemed absorbed in a divine mood. Those who followed Her sang along: Omkaramengum

The sound 'Om' resonates everywhere Echoing in every atom; With a peaceful mindy Let us chanty 'Om Shakti. '

The tears of sadness are overflowing. And now Mother is my only support. Bless me with Your beautiful hands. For I have given up All worldly enjoyments.

The fear of death has disappeared. The desire for physical beauty is gone. I must constantly remember Your form That shines with the light of Shiva.

When I am filled with an inner light That overflows and shines before me, And I am drunk with devotion, I will merge in the beauty of Your form. Your form

Is what I have longed the most to see. All existing loveliness has crystallized And comes as this unequaled Beauty. Oh now my tears are overflowing...

When the song ended, Mother walked back to the ashram, and everyone followed Her in silence. Reaching the ashram. Mother sat down in the sand on its western side. Seeing that She wanted complete solitude, the brahmacharis withdrew, one by one.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE BRAHMACHARIS

After giving darshan to the devotees. Mother emerged from the hut and walked towards the brahmacharis' huts. Occasionally, She would inspect their rooms, checking to see if everything was arranged neatly, whether anyone was keeping unnecessary things for private use, and if the rooms were being swept daily. She didn't want to see more than one library book in anyone's room, nor one more dhoti or shirt than absolutely necessary‰Ûand it was impossible to fool Mother.

One day, noticing that a brahmachari had a straw mat spread over a piece of carpet to sleep on. Mother remarked, "We used to sleep on the bare cement floor, or a dirt floor. Usually there was no mats or sheets. Sometimes, the whole family would sleep together on mats spread on the floor,and the babies would wet the mats. That's how we grew up. Gayatri will tell you that even now Amma sleeps mostly on the bare floor, though She has a cot and a mattress. You children grew up in comfort at home. It would be hard for you to sleep on the dirt floor."

The brahmachari quickly rolled up the carpet.

That day Mother went inside one of the huts and picked up a packet from under a writing table. She seemed to know exactly where it was, as if She had kept it there Herself.

"What is this, son?" She asked the brahmachari who lived there. His face went pale. Mother sat down on the floor and opened the packet. It contained ariyundas (sweet balls made from rice flour).

"Your parents brought these for their darling son, right?" The brahmachari lowered his head. It was true. His parents had brought them the day before. He had asked them to give the packet to Gayatri, to distribute to everyone, but they wouldn't listen. "We brought a separate packet for Amma and Her other children. This is just for you," they said. When they insisted, he didn't object.

Some other brahmacharis had followed Mother into the hut. She gave each one an ariyunda.

Mother: "Son, Amma would like to see you slice even a banana into a hundred pieces and give each person a piece. Lots of people bring sweets and snacks for Amma, but She can't eat anything by Herself. She keeps everything for Her children. Sometimes, She will put a pinch of something in Her mouth, just to please them. Do you know how much trouble some people go through to make something for Amma, to pack it and bring it here, spending money on bus fares and other things?" She paused, and then asked the brahmachari, "Son, did Amma make you unhappy?"

Mother made the brahmachari put his head on Her lap. She broke one of the sweets and after putting a bit in Her own mouth, fed him the rest. This only increased his sorrow. Mother said, "Don't cry, my son! Amma is saying these things only so that you won't remain attached to your family. At least you didn't eat all of it yourself, but kept some aside. If it had been someone else, we wouldn't have seen even the paper it was wrapped in, right?" She asked the others with a smile.

To change the subject, Mother reached over and picked up a book. The book was covered with dust". She tapped the dust off. It was a primer on Sanskrit.

Mother: "Haven't you been going to the Sanskrit class?"

Br: "I didn't go to the last two or three classes, Amma. The grammar doesn't stick to my mind at all."

Mother: "Looking at this book, it seems that you haven't touched it for at least a month. Son, you shouldn't show this kind of negligence towards your textbooks. Learning is a form of Devi Saraswati. You should approach learning with shraddha and devotion. Whenever you pick up or put down a book, you should touch it with reverence and bow to it. Keep the books neat and clean. That is what we all learned.

"If you are reluctant to learn Sanskrit, how will you understand our scriptures? Sanskrit is our mother-tongue. You can't fully appreciate the Upanishads or the Gita without understanding Sanskrit. To understand the mantras and chants, you should learn them in that language. It is the language of our culture. We can't separate the culture of India from Sanskrit. It is true that we can buy the translations of the scriptural texts in other languages, but they don't amount to the real thing. If you want to know the taste of honey, you have to taste it by itself. If you mix it with something else, you won't get its true taste. Even uttering Sanskrit words is good for our mental well-being.

"But, children, it is important that you don't learn Sanskrit just to show off your knowledge. It should be done to enhance your mental refinement. View Sanskrit only as an instrument for that. Once you find out from a newspaper ad where you can get mangoes, the smart thing is to buy the mangoes and enjoy them, and not just stare at their picture in the paper. Anyway, don't worry, son. From now on at least, try to learn Sanskrit diligently."

"It is good to know Sanskrit. But you don't need to spend a lifetime learning grammar. If you go out in front of people today displaying your knowledge of Sanskrit, they won't appreciate it much. All the scriptures emerged from the minds of the sages who led a life of tapas. Tapas makes everything clear and transparent. A person who does tapas can learn in a day what an ordinary person learns in ten days. Therefore, tapas is the important thing. Sanskrit and Vedanta are also important”one should study them‶€”but we learn in order to know what our life's goal is, and what path will lead us to it. Once we know that, we should try to advance on that path.

"When we get to a railway station, we look up the train schedule, buy the ticket, and get on the appropriate train. Many people who consider themselves scholars are like those who stay at the station memorizing the train schedule. They don't put their learning to use.

"If we have a big bag of sugar, do we have to eat all of it to know that it is sweet? When we are hungry, we should eat just enough food to appease our hunger; we don't have to eat everything in the kitchen. The so-called scholars don't think in this way. They seem to want to eat the whole thing, and they waste their lives doing that.

"Most scholars today have only learning, and no experience; and what is the result? Even after studying until the age of ninety, they are not free from sorrow. Most of them sit at home, recalling what they have studied. If they had learned what was needed and, at the same time, performed tapas, then their knowledge would have done them and the world some good. This is why Amma says that you should learn the scriptures up to a point, but then do tapas. Only that will bring your learning to the plane of experience, bring peace to you, and enable you to do something good for the world.

"After you have studied and gained strength through spiritual discipline, serve others, and thereby save a lot of people. There are some individuals who sit in front of the temple reading the Gita and the Upanishads, but who would shrink from anybody who might approach them crying, 'Don't touch me, don't touch me!' What kind of devotion do they have? A tape recorder will play back what others have already said. Similarly, these people just spit out the words of wisdom someone else has said before, but they can't put the knowledge to work in their own lives. They can't be loving towards anyone, for they are never free from pride and jealousy. What is the use of such scholarship? Children, we should love our fellow beings and be compassionate towards those who suffer. Without that, we can never reach God. Without having love for others, we are just selfish creatures."

A brahmachari who was listening to Mother asked, "If meditation will lead to true knowledge, why can't we just meditate all the time? What are the classes for? What is karma yoga for?"

Mother: "That is fine. But who can meditate every hour of the day? If we sit for an hour, do we get concentration even for five minutes? That is why Amma says that we have to work for the good of the world after we have meditated. One shouldn't doze off in the name of meditation and become a burden to the world. We happen to be born; and now we should be of some benefit to the world before we depart.

"If someone can meditate twenty-four hours a day, that is good. Amma will not send them anywhere. She will give them all the facilities they need. But once they sit for meditation, they should truly meditate. It is not meditation if the mind is roaming around in a thousand other places while you sit in one spot. The mind has to be fixed on God, then it becomes meditation. If you do your work while remembering God and chanting your mantra, that is also meditation. Meditation is not only just sitting still.

Br: "Amma, how do you suggest that we serve the world?"

Mother: "Today people are lost without knowing what our culture means. We should make them understand what real samskara is. Countless people are suffering from poverty both material and spiritual poverty. We should try to eliminate that. If we don't have any food to give to those who are hungry, we should go out and beg for food to feed them. That is what real strength means. We should not be doing tapas just for our own liberation; tapas should be done to gain the strength needed to serve the world. When our mind becomes that compassionate, God-realization will soon follow. We can reach our goal faster through compassionate service than by tapas alone. (Laughing) But what good is someone who sits around, half asleep, in the name of tapas, serving no one at all?"

Br: "Amma, let us first learn who we are. Can't we wait until then to start serving the world? Right now, so many people claim to be serving the world. The world has not changed a bit. On the other hand, isn't it true that just one individual who has attained liberation can change the whole world?"

Mother closed Her eyes. She remained looking inward for a little while. Then She opened Her eyes slowly.

Mother: "Children, if you say that you can't do service, that you just want liberation, then show that kind of intensity! Those who have that kind of yearning will not let even a moment pass without remembering God. Eating and sleeping will mean nothing to them. Their hearts will be aching for God always."

MEMORIES OF MOTHER'S CHILDHOOD

Tears welled up in Mother's eyes. She then spoke about Her memories of some touching scenes from Her childhood.

Mother: "Once Amma started searching for God, She was writhing in agony until She reached the goal. The tears never stopped. There was no sleep. When the sun set. Her heart was violently agitated. Wasn't another day lost? Hadn't She wasted another day without knowing the Lord? The sorrow was too much to bear. She would stay awake all night, thinking that if She didn't sleep, the day would not be lost. Always, there was this question: 'Where are you? Where are you?' Unable to bear the pain of not seeing the Lord, She would bite and tear at Her own body. Sometimes She would roll around on the floor, crying aloud, calling the Lord's names. She would spontaneously burst into tears. She never felt like laughing. What good is laughter when you haven't yet known God? 'How can I rejoice without knowing you? Why should I eat when I don't know you? Why take a bath?' Amma went through each day in this manner."

Mother stopped for a moment and then continued: "When you experience severe detachment, you may dislike the world. But you have to get beyond that stage as well. You have to see that everything is God.

"Amma felt great love towards poor people when She was young. When they were starving, She stole food from home and brought it to them. Later, when She was feeling unbearable grief because She hadn't yet seen God, She turned against the whole world. She felt angry at Nature. She would say, 'I don't like you at all. Mother Nature, because you make us do things that are wrong!' She would spit at Mother Nature and shout at her using whatever words came to Her mouth. It became a form of madness.

"When food was placed in front of Her, She would split into it. It was a very difficult condition. She was angry at everything. She felt like throwing mud at anyone who came near Her. When She saw someone suffering. She would think that it was because of their selfishness, and that they were just experiencing the fruits of their karma. But this attitude soon changed. She started thinking, 'People are making mistakes out of ignorance; if we forgive them and love them, they will stop making mistakes. If we get angry at them, won't they just repeat their bad actions?' When these thoughts came. Her heart was filled with compassion. Her anger disappeared completely."

Mother sat immersed in meditation for a little while. Everyone drew mental pictures of Mother's childhood according to their own imagination. Mother Nature, who had witnessed those incomparable scenes, was also quiet and still.

Mother said in a deep voice: "Children, your heart should constantly throb and ache for God. There shouldn't be a single instant when you do not remember God. Only those who have done this have attained salvation."

Mother's words of advice on detachment and yearning for liberation touched the hearts of the listeners. They all stood there quietly, forgetting the external world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Friday, September 20, 1985

BRAHMACHARIS AND HOUSEHOLDERS

Some devotees were standing in front of the meditation room waiting for Mother. Having given the brahmacharis some instructions on meditation, Mother emerged and greeted the devotees: "Where are you from, children?"

Devotee: "From Kollam, Amma."

Mother: "Have you been here before, son?"

Devotee: "I tried to come here two or three times, but each time I couldn't make the trip due to some unexpected reason. After all, isn't it true that our decision alone is not enough to get the darshan of a mahatma? I go to Kanyakumari often on business, but so far I haven't been able to see Mayiamma there. I don't know why. I visit a lot of ashrams. Last year the whole family went to Rishikesh."

Mother: "You are finding time to do these things in the midst of your busy work. That itself is God's blessing."

Devotee: "This is the only thing that keeps me steady. Otherwise, how can I sleep peacefully with all my business activities? Having a relationship with ashrams and sannyasis allows me to experience some relief from life's problems.
and it brings me peace. If it wasn't for this, I would have resorted to the liquor shop long ago." Mother: "O Shiva! Shiva!"

Devotee: "Amma, although I have visited many ashrams, I have never felt an atmosphere so charged with divine essence as this place. Also, I have not seen so many young ashram residents anywhere else.

Mother: "The children who are here first saw Amma when they were in college or working at different jobs. They threw away everything and came to Amma, even though most of them did not know the meaning of spirituality or meditation. They all seemed to get some form of madness when they saw Amma. Their minds were no longer on their job or studies. They no longer ate at the proper time or bothered to wash their clothes; they didn't pay attention to anything, and they wouldn't leave Amma's side. She tried to drive them off, but none of them would go. Finally, Amma had to accept defeat. She had to keep everyone here. Even though Amma is everything to them, they still need to do sadhana. Today they are not interested in the outer world, because of their love for Her, but they cannot maintain that without doing sadhana.

"Doesn't Amma have to look after them in every way, these children who have taken refuge in Her? In the past. She had time to take care of them, but now She is not able to give them enough attention because of the increasing number of devotees. Therefore, whenever She gets time. She makes them sit down and meditate, as She did just now. Furthermore, She has told them to tell Her immediately when they have a problem. They don't have to wait for an appropriate time for that. She is, after all, the only mother, father, and guru they have."

Devotee: "Amma, I regret that I am a householder. Will I be able to get Self-realization?"

Mother: "Son, there are no householders or brahmacharis in the eyes of God. He looks only at your mind. You can lead a truly spiritual life while remaining a householder. You will be able to enjoy the bliss of the Self, but your mind has to be on God all the time. Then you can easily attain bliss. A mother bird will be thinking of the young ones in the nest, even when she is out looking for food. Similarly, you have to keep your mind on God, while engaged in all worldly actions. The important thing is to be completely dedicated to God or the guru. Once you have that dedication, the goal will not be far away.

"Once a guru came with his disciples to a village to give spiritual discourses. A businessman came with his family everyday to hear his talks. By the time the satsangs were over, he became a devotee of the guru, and he and his family decided to live in the guru's ashram.

"When the guru returned to his ashram, he saw the businessman and family waiting for him. They told the guru of their decision to live in the ashram. The guru explained to them the difficulties of ashram life, but since his explanations could not turn the devotee away, the guru agreed in the end. And so, the businessman and his family became permanent residents of the ashram.

"They took part in the ashram work just like the other residents. However, the other disciples did not like having a householder living in the ashram with his family. They began complaining about the businessman and his family. The guru decided to demonstrate to his disciples the strength of the new devotee's dedication. He called the devotee and said, 'You have given up your home and your wealth, and now you don't have anything. Unfortunately, there are not enough resources here at the ashram. We somehow manage here because the brahmacharis work hard. It would have been easy if you were single; it is hard to bear the expenses of your wife and children as well. So beginning tomorrow, you should go out and work, and earn enough for their upkeep.' The devotee agreed.

"The next day, he found a job in the town nearby, and every evening, he brought his earnings to the guru. After a few days the disciples began to complain again. So the guru called the devotee again and said, 'The money you bring is enough for your expenses, but it is not enough for the upkeep of your wife and children. Since the ashram has met all their expenses until now, you should work twice as much and pay off your debt to the ashram. Only after that may you and your family eat at the ashram.'

"The devotee called his wife and children and explained, 'Until we pay off the debt, we shouldn't eat anything here. It would be a burden to our guru, and therefore a sin. I will bring you some food at night. Please be patient until then.' They agreed. From the next day onward, he worked from morning until very late at night and gave all his wages to the guru, sharing with his wife and children any food he got at the work place. Some days there was nothing, and the family went hungry.

"The other disciples were astonished to see that the devotee and his family didn't leave the ashram in spite of these difficulties. They complained again to the guru, 'Nowadays, the businessman is coming back only late at night. He is making money working outside, while his wife and children live comfortably here at the ashram. What a convenient arrangement!'

That night the guru waited for the devotee. When he came and prostrated at his feet, the guru told him, 'You are a cheat! Don't prostrate to me. You keep your family here, while you amass private wealth by working outside; and yet you claim that you are giving everything you earn to the ashram.' The devotee didn't say anything in reply. He listened to the guru with folded hands. Then he silently went to his room.

"Later that night, the guru called all the disciples and said, 'Tomorrow there will be a feast at the ashram. There is no firewood here. Someone should go to the forest immediately, and bring some firewood. We need it before sunrise.' Then he went to bed. Who would go to the forest at such a late hour? The disciples awakened the devotee. They told him of the guru's command to get firewood immediately for the feast the next day. The devotee gladly set out to the forest, while the other disciples went to bed.

"When he didn't see the devotee at dawn the next day, the guru called the other disciples and inquired about him. They replied that he had gone to gather firewood. The guru and the disciples went to the forest in search of the devotee. They searched everywhere, but couldn't find him. Finally, when they called out his name, they heard a voice in reply. The voice came from a large well. The devotee had slipped and fallen into the well while returning with some firewood in the darkness. Although it was not very deep, it was difficult to climb out of the well without help. Also, since he had eaten no food for several days, the poor man didn't have the strength to get out with all the firewood.

"The guru asked the disciples to get the devotee out of the well. It was very dark down there. When they extended their hands into the well, they could feel a bundle of firewood. They asked the devotee to raise his hands, but he replied, 'If I let go, the firewood will fall into the water. I am holding it up so that it doesn't get wet. Please give this to our guru as soon as possible. It is for the morning feast. You can get me out after that.'

"The guru's eyes were filled with tears when he saw the dedication of his devotee. He asked the disciples to lift him out of the well immediately, but he agreed to come up only after someone had taken the firewood from him. The guru embraced the devotee, who was shivering with cold after being in the well for so long. He was so pleased with his selfless love and surrender that he immediately blessed the devotee with Self-realization.

"Children, no one loses the chance for Self-realization because he is a grihasthashrami. Whether one is a brahmachari or a householder, the important thing is the attitude of faith and surrender to the guru."

A FEW MOMENTS WITH THE BRAHMACHARIS

Br. Ramakrishnan brought some water for Mother to drink. From the way his lips moved, one could see that he was always chanting his mantra.

Mother is very particular that one chants a mantra constantly while cooking and serving food for Her. One day Bri. Gayatri brought Her some tea. Mother gave the cup of tea back to Gayatri and said, "While you made this tea, your mind was not on what you were doing or on your mantra. You were thinking of Australia. You can drink this yourself."

Gayatri went back quietly, remembering that she had been talking to a brahmacharini about her early days in Australia while she was making the tea. She again made tea, this time with shraddha and constantly chanting her mantra. While drinking it, Mother said, 'Tour heart is in this. That, more than the taste of it, is what makes me feel like drinking it."

Ramakrishnan prostrated before Mother and sat close to Her. The previous day, someone on the ferry had said bad things about the ashram. Ramakrishnan happened to hear it and he couldn't bear it. He reacted to them loudly. When he mentioned this incident, Mother said:

"Son, you are happy when everyone praises Amma and shows love for all of you. You are satisfied when others nod their heads in assent at whatever you say. You drink it all in like nectar. Where thousands of people gather, two or three of them may speak against us. That is when we should look within ourselves. We should see how patiently we can welcome such a situation. We shouldn't get angry at them. If we get angry at them and ask them not to come here again, do they get any benefit from our lives?

"Each one of our acts should benefit the world. Don't we appreciate a teacher's ability the most when their worst students, who normally can't learn anything, are successful in their examinations? We can claim that our life has been beneficial, only if we can cultivate and reap a harvest from the land that lies neglected, covered with rubbish and weeds.

"The people you encountered yesterday, just travel on the surface of the ocean. All they want is fish. But we can't just do what they do, because we are looking for pearls. Only if we dive deep and search carefully will we perhaps get one pearl.

"They may have said some things out of ignorance, but if we react to them angrily, who is more ignorant? If we make a lot of noise, just like them, what will be the opinion of others around us? We should take care to maintain our balance even when other people oppose us or speak ill of us. That is a sadhana. It is an opportunity to measure our patience. We should welcome such situations with equanimity."

A brahmachari mentioned the case of three residents of an ashram in North India, who had come here recently and wanted to live here.

Mother: "Someone who visited their ashram had given them a copy of Amma's biography. When they read it, they immediately wanted to be with Her. They made up some excuse to leave their ashram, and came down here. Amma had to be persistent in sending them back. We can't keep those who come from other ashrams, without the permission of the authorities there."

A group of devotees had gathered around Mother by this time, and She led all of them to the darshan hut.

FEEDING HER CHILDREN

Mother often talks about the importance of vows and observances in the life of a spiritual seeker. Vows are a means of conquering the mind; nevertheless, She is against anyone becoming the slave of any particular vow or observance. Mother gives special importance to fasting and the vow of silence. She had asked ashram residents to fast and, if possible, observe silence every Saturday. This was being followed regularly. Some inmates observed silence throughout the day, and would talk only to Mother. Some of them maintained silence until six in the evening. Everyone was expected to remain in the meditation room until dusk. No one was supposed to go out.

One Saturday, Mother made everyone go into the meditation room at seven in the morning, and then She locked the door from the outside. She had told them earlier that She expected them to spend the whole day in japa and meditation. They all took their seats and were soon immersed in meditation. They opened their eyes at nine o'clock hearing Mother's voice.

"Children..."

There was a glass of sweet coffee in front of each of them, some sweetened aval (flattened rice) and two bananas. Mother was standing before them with a smile.

"Children, you are to meditate only after eating this."

She closed the door and went out. They all ate Mother's prasad with great devotion, and then resumed their japa and meditation.

A bell rang. The brahmacharis looked at each other in astonishment, for it was the lunch bell. The time was twelve-thirty. The brahmachari who cooked lunch every day was in the meditation room, so the question was, 'Who cooked lunch today? What is this new leela (divine play) of Mother's?' While everyone was wondering about this, a devotee came to inform them that Mother was calling them for lunch. They found Mother waiting for them in the dining room. She had arranged their plates in the usual places, had served the rice and curries, and placed a glass of drinking water next to each plate. All they had to do was to eat. There was one more curry than usual. Mother's special! She Herself served them as they ate.

Mother told the householder devotees who were eating with the brahmacharis: "As Amma came out after locking Her children in the meditation room, She began to think how cruel She was to make Her children starve like that. Going to the kitchen, She saw that there was no food there, so She prepared some sweet aval and coffee, and found some bananas as well. She put everything in front of the children. After all, their minds would wander if they went out of the room. She also wanted to teach them the lesson that if we take refuge in God completely, He will bring everything we need right in front of us.

"Then She came back to the kitchen and cooked rice and vegetables. Since Amma had told the children that no one should be found outside, all of them remained in the meditation room. It has been a long time since Amma cooked something for Her children. At last, today She was able to do this. Amma is ready to starve for any length of time, but She doesn't have the strength to see Her children go hungry. With more and more devotees coming, Amma does not get as much time as before to pay attention to Her children living in the ashram. She knows that God is making sure that they lack nothing."

A brahmachari had stopped on his way to the meditation room. He heard footsteps behind him and looked back.

Mother was coming towards him with a smile. Br. Rao was also with Her.

"What were you thinking about?" Mother asked.

"I happened to remember how you made us fast on a Saturday some time ago."

Mother: "How come you remembered it today?"

Br: "It is Saturday today, isn't it?"

Mother: "Don't waste time standing here. It's time for meditation." She proceeded with the two of them to the meditation room.

Mother told the brahmacharis waiting in the meditation room: "Children, don't try to still your mind by force when you sit for meditation. The thoughts will rise up with ten times their original force if you do that. It is like pressing down a spring. Try to find out where the thoughts

arise from, and control them with that knowledge. Don't place the mind in any kind of tension. If any part of your body is tense or feels any pain, the mind will linger on that. Relax every part of the body, and watch your thoughts with absolute awareness. Then the mind will subside by itself.

"Don't follow your thoughts. If you follow them, only your body will be here; your mind will be somewhere else. Haven't you seen cars moving on a dusty road? They stir up plenty of dust as they speed by, and you can't see the cars at all. If you are following such a car, you will be bathed in dust. Even if you stand on the roadside, you will be covered with dust. So when you see a car coming, you have to stand at a distance. In the same way, we should watch our thoughts from a distance. If we go near them, they will drag us along without our knowledge; but if we watch from a distance, we can see the dust settling, and peace returning."

MOTHER WITH OTTOOR

Ottoor Unni Namboodiripad, a great devotee of Krishna and a celebrated poet, had come to live in the ashram. He was eighty-two years old and in very poor health. His only wish was to die in Mother's lap. He was given a room built over the meditation cave, just behind the kalari.

It was nine in the evening when Mother went to Ottoor's room. Some brahmacharis were also in the room. Even though Mother tried to stop him, Ottoor got down on the floor with great difficulty and prostrated to Her. She helped him up and made him sit on his bed, and sat down next to him. If She remained standing, he would refuse to sit.

Ottoor: "Amma, please say something! Let me hear your words!"

Mother: "But you know everything, son."

Ottoor: "Hasn't this son put all the brahmacharis to a lot of trouble?"

A brahmachari: "No, not at all! It is our good fortune that we have the opportunity to serve you. Where else would we get such good satsang?"

Mother: "Your first prayer should indeed be for the good

fortune to serve God's devotees. That is the only way for us to reach Him."

SEVA AND SADHANA

Br: "But, Amma, isn't it true that service, however great it is, amounts only to karma yoga? Shankaracharya has said that even if the mind is purified through karma yoga, one attains Self-realization only through jnana."

Mother: "The Self is not only confined within you but pervades everything in the universe. We can attain the level of Self-realization only when we perceive that everything is one and the same. We won't be admitted to God's world without the signature of even the smallest ant on our entry papers. The first requirement, along with remembrance of God, is to love everyone and everything, both the sentient and the insentient. If we have that greatness of heart, liberation won't be far behind.

"We go to the temple, circumambulate three times, and bow down to the deity; but on our way out, we scowl at the beggar who is at the door! That is our present disposition. We will deserve realization only when we see, even in that beggar, the One to whom we just prostrated. While working in the world, we should serve people, seeing them as God. In this way, we will become humble and respectful. It all counts for nothing if we begin to feel,'/ am doing service to the world!' Anything we do with that attitude has nothing to do with seva. Real seva means that our words.

our smile, and our actions are accompanied by love and the attitude that 'I am nothing.'

"People are not aware of their real essence. Look at the little birds living at the pond. They don't know that they have wings. They don't want to fly high and enjoy the nectar from the flowers on the trees around the pond. They just live on the dirt of the pond. Yet, if they were to soar into the air and taste the nectar, they wouldn't go back to the dirt below. Similarly, people spend their

lives being ignorant of the bliss one gets from pure love of God. Our aim is to make them aware of that, and to lead them to their true nature. That is our duty towards the ashram."

Br: "How can we do selfless service without knowing the truth of the Self?"

Mother: "Children, service is also a form of sadhana. If you claim that you have attained perfection after doing sadhana sitting in a certain place, Amma will not accept that. Getting out into the world and doing service is very much a part of sadhana. If we want to eliminate the enemies that lurk in the innermost depths of the heart, we have to serve the world. Only then will we be able to tell how effective our meditation has been. Only when someone gets angry with us, will we know whether we still have anger in us.

"The jackal thinks, as he sits alone in the forest, 'Now I am strong; I am not going to howl the next time I see a dog.' But as soon as he sees a dog, he forgets everything and starts howling loudly. When we mingle with people.

we have to stay above anger in circumstances when they are angry. Only then can we understand the extent of our growth.

"You might get high marks in your school exams, but that may not get you a job. To qualify for the job, you have to do exceptionally well in the test taken by thousands of people applying for the job. Similarly, after your meditation has taken you to a certain level, you should work for society. Only when you have the strength to withstand any ridicule and abuse heaped on you, will Amma say that you are complete.

"Even an inexperienced driver can drive a car through an empty meadow. The true test of someone's driving skill is his ability to drive safely through crowded streets. Likewise, you cannot say that someone is courageous, just because he sits in solitude and does spiritual practices. The truly courageous person is one who, as he engages in a variety of tasks, can go forward without faltering in the least in the midst of adversity. He can be called a true sage. No circumstance can destroy his mental poise.

"Thus service should be seen as sadhana, and should be an offering to God. Then, if someone opposes us, we may feel some slight hostility, but we can get rid of it through contemplation. 'Who in him was the object of my anger? Didn't I get angry at him because I took myself to be the body? What have I learned from the scriptures? Which world (spiritual or material) am I traveling to? How could I feel any ill-will towards that person after declaring that I am not the body or the mind, but the soul?' We should do this type of self-examination repeatedly. Eventually, we will stop feeling anger towards anyone. We will feel remorse, and that will lead us on the right path."

Br: "If we don't say a word in response when others show their hostility, aren't we giving them the opportunity to err and to use foul language? Is it right on such occasions to remain quiet, imagining we are the Atman? Won't they take our patience only as a weakness?"

NON-DUALITY IN DAILY LIFE

Mother: "We should see everything as Brahman; but we should also use our discrimination to act properly in each situation. Suppose we stand on the roadside, and a dog comes running our way followed by a crowd shouting, 'Here comes a mad dog!' The rabid dog has no discrimination, and it will bite us if we stand in its way. So we should move aside, or perhaps even pick up a stick. Amma does not advise that we close our eyes to this threat. Still, we mustn't beat the dog unnecessarily, for it doesn't know right from wrong. Instead, we can deny it the chance to bite us by getting out of its way.

In other words, we should see not only the dog, but also the people who warned us, as Brahman. Each is given its proper due. If we ignore the warning to get out of the way, and simply stand in front of the dog thinking it is Brahman, we will surely get bitten. There is no point in feeling sorry later.

"Children, we should use our discrimination in every situation. A spiritual seeker should never be weak. Think of a little boy, our Shivan (Mother s nephew), for instance. He makes many

mistakes and we may spank him a lot, but we have no animosity towards him. We are not spanking him out of revenge. He is a little boy, and we know that he is making mistakes out of ignorance. Nevertheless, if we punish him today, he will be careful tomorrow, so we put on a show of anger. That is the attitude we should have. Certainly we have to rein in those who act without discrimination, but we must not lose our own equanimity while doing so. Even as we show our displeasure outwardly, we should love them, and wish that they become good. In this way, we ourselves make progress.

"Like a lion on the outside, but like a flower within‚€" that is how a sadhak should be. His heart should be like a blossoming flower that never withers. Yet externally, he should be brave and strong as a lion; then he will be able to guide the world. While doing sadhana, however, he should be like the lowliest of servants. A seeker should assume the attitude of a beggar. He will beg for food, yet walk away without getting angry, even if he receives nothing but abuse. With this attitude, he will make progress. Children, only a courageous person can be patient. This beggar-like attitude during his sadhana will actually strengthen his courage; the seed of courage will sprout only in the soil of patience."

The aged "Unnikannan" (baby Krishna, as Mother called Ottoor) sat on his bed, leaning forward, his face beaming with joy as he took in the sweet, ambrosial words flowing from Mother. When he saw Mother getting up to leave, he bowed to Her from where he sat, and offered Her a packet containing sugar, which had been offered to the Lord in the Guruvayoor temple. (Ottoor had been associated with the Guruvayoor temple all his life, and he always kept some prasad from there with him.) Mother gave him the first chance to enjoy the prasad from the packet, by carefully placing a little of the blessed sugar on his tongue.

Tuesday, September 24, 1985

A COOKING LESSON

It was after five in the evening. A brahmacharini was cutting vegetables for dinner. Every few minutes, she got up to keep the cooking fire going. Seeing this as She came into the kitchen. Mother said, "Daughter, you can go and take care of the fire. Amma will do this." Having sent the brahmacharini to tend the fire. Mother started cutting the vegetables Herself. Seeing Mother engaged in this task, several others joined Her.

Mother: "Children, that daughter was struggling alone here. She had to cut the vegetables and keep the stove going at the same time. None of you came to help; but as soon as Amma came, all of you came running to help. Children, sadhana does not mean sitting idly somewhere. You should feel compassion when you see others struggling. You should feel the urge to help. Sadhana is done to develop a mind filled with compassion; once you have acquired that, you have everything. When Amma is on the scene, everyone comes running. That is not true devotion. The person who is able to love everyone equally is the one who loves Amma."

A brahmachari: "Amma, the other day I came to the kitchen to help, but I ended up being scolded."

Mother: "You must have done some mischief."

Br: "It seems that I had cut the vegetables into pieces that were too large."

Mother and the others laughed. Mother called the brahmacharini.

Mother (still laughing): "Did you scold this son the other day, even though he was here to help?"

Bri: "It's true that he came to help, but as a result, my work only doubled. I told him to chop the vegetables into small pieces. Instead, he made large pieces, and I had to cut each piece again. It took twice as long. I told him that if this was what he was going to do, he didn't have to come and help again."

Mother: "But he isn't used to this; isn't that why he did it that way? Shouldn't you have shown him how you wanted it done? He is not used to cutting vegetables, because he hasn't done any work at home."

Mother explained to everyone how to cut vegetables properly. By the time the cooking lesson was over, the vegetables had all been chopped. A brahmacharini brought some water, and Mother washed Her hands and left the kitchen.

MOTHER BLESSES A COW

Mother walked to the cowshed. Those who followed Her saw an astonishing sight. Mother knelt beside a cow and began to drink its milk directly from the udders! The cow let the milk flow generously; when Mother let go of one nipple and began to suck another, milk dripped onto Her face. The eyes of that cow, which had the good fortune to suckle the Mother of the World, seemed to say, "All my tapas were done for this one moment. Now my life has been fulfilled."

Mother came out wiping Her face with the end of her sari. Seeing all Her children gathered there. She said, "That cow has been wishing to give milk to Amma for a long time."

Mother fulfills the silent wishes of even a cow. It must indeed have been a blessed soul.

Mother continued: "Long ago, when Amma s family and the neighbours were against Her, the birds and animals came to help Her. From Her own experience, Amma can say that if you surrender totally to God, He will make sure that you don't lack anything. When there was no one to feed Her, a dog would bring a packet of rice from somewhere, holding the packet between its teeth. Sometimes, Amma hadn't eaten for days. After Her meditation. She would lie unconscious in the sand somewhere. When She opened Her eyes. She would discover one of the cows standing next to Her with its udders full of milk, ready for Her to drink. Amma would drink as much as She wanted. That cow would come and offer her milk whenever Amma felt tired."

The devotees, who regretted that they hadn't been present to witness that leela, at least had the good fortune to witness the cow suckling Mother on this day.

WORSHIPPING THE DEITIES AND THE GURU

As Mother walked back to the ashram, a brahmachari asked: "Amma, do the deities really exist?"
Mother: "They exist on the subtle plane. Each deity represents a characteristic that is latent within us. But you should view your chosen deity as indistinguishable from the Supreme Self. God can assume any form He wants. God will assume many forms depending on the desires of the devotees. Doesn't the ocean rise up in response to the attraction exerted by the moon?"

Br: "Amma, rather than worshipping the deities whom we have never seen, isn't it best to take refuge in the mahatmas who are alive among us?"

Mother: "Yes. A real tapasvi has the power to assume the burden of our Prarabdha. If we take refuge in a mahatma with devotion, our prarabdhas will soon end. One has to make more effort to benefit from worship of the deities, or from temple worship.

"If we worship our chosen deity with the attitude that he is the Supreme Self, we can indeed attain Self-realization. A form is Uke a ladder. Just as all shadows disappear at high noon, all forms will eventually merge in the formless; but if we take refuge in a satguru, our path will be easier. A guru's help is necessary to remove the obstacles in sadhana, and to show us the way. A guru can help us by clearing our doubts in all crises; then the journey will be easier. A child can do whatever he wants if his mother is holding his hand. He won't fall even if he takes both feet off the ground. The child shouldn't try to free himself from the grip of his mother; he should let her guide him, or he will fall down. Likewise, a guru will always come to the aid of the disciple."

A devotee: "Is meditating on a mahatma equal to meditating on the Self?"

Mother: "If we view a mahatma in the proper light, we can reach Brahman. In reality, the mahatma is formless. If we make the shape of a bitter melon out of chocolate, it will still be sweet. The mahatmas, who have attained perfect knowledge of the Self, are the same as Brahman having assumed a form. All their forms and moods are sweet."

Br: "Some people meditate on Amma, others on Kali. Is there any difference between the two?"

Mother: "If you look at the real essence what is the difference? Whatever form you meditate on, the important thing is your sankalpa, what you attribute to the form. You will get the result appropriate to that. Some people meditate on certain deities and obtain siddhis; they do this

to achieve certain results. Their concept of the deity's form is a very limited one. We should see the principle behind the deity. Only then can we go beyond the form, beyond the limits. We need to understand that everything is the all-pervading Self; we have to see the deity we worship as the undivided Self. It is only a difference in sankalpa. People sometimes worship a deity in the course of certain observances or rituals. This involves only the concept of a deity, not of God.

"All forms are limited. No tree touches the heavens, and no root reaches the netherworld. We are trying to reach the Supreme Self. When we get on a bus we are not planning to live in it, are we? Our aim is to reach home. The bus will take us to our gate, and it is our job to walk from the gate to the house. Deities will bring us to the doorway of the Supreme Sat-chit-ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss); from there, it is not far to the state of Self-realization. Even those who have transcended all limitations do not forsake their hold on a form. It is said that even jivanmuktas those who have attained liberation in this life‚€" crave to hear the name of God."

Revealing the subtle nuances of sadhana. Mother'swords kindled new light in the minds of the listeners. All bowed to Her with a sense of fulfilment, and returned to their normal duties.

Sunday, October 13, 1985

One who sees every being in himself and sees himself in everything else, does not shrink with aversion from anything thereafter. - Isavasya Upanishad.

Mother was preparing to empty and clean the septic tank attached to the guest house toilet, because the tank was full. She had just returned from a day-long journey that had included bhajans and darshan. The moment She was back in the ashram, She took up the job. Not that Her children were unwilling to do this work‚€"in fact, they had requested Mother to stand aside, but She insisted on setting an example. This was usually the case; rarely did She ask someone else to do the job.

Mother: "A mother does not mind cleaning up the excreta of her baby, because she has the sense of 'kindness' towards the baby. Be that as it may, we should have that same love towards everyone, then we won't feel any aversion or disgust."

The excitement of working with Mother is something special; it is intoxicating and even now, everyone yearned to work alongside Her, even though it was hard toil. No one asks whether it means dealing with sand, cement, or feces.

Mother continued: "In the old days, there were no lavatory facilities for those who came for darshan. That meant that the first job of Amma's oldest children each morning was to clean up the ashram surroundings. There were no fences separating the adjacent properties. So, most of the time, we ended up cleaning the neighbours' property as well."

A brahmachari was gingerly handling the buckets filled with the contents of the septic tank, taking care not to slosh or spill anything. As buckets began to be passed rapidly, his attention wavered and one bucket fell to the ground, the excreta splashing all over his body.

Mother: "Don't worry, son. After all, we carry all this inside us. It will wash off The real dirt is the attitude that I am the doer while doing anything, whether it is puja or cleaning the gutter. That attitude is hard to wash away. My children, you should learn to consider any work you do as an offering to God; then you will be purified within. That is why Amma is making you do all this. Amma doesn't want Her darling children to stand apart ordering others to do such work. A brahmachari should be fit to do any kind of work."

Not only the brahmacharis, but some of the devotees also took part in the work. One devotee was awakened by all the noise and light, and came out to discover what was going on. When he saw what Mother was doing, he could not stand aside. Taking off his shirt and tucking up his dhoti, he began to get into the septic tank.

Mother: "No, son. The work is almost done. There is

no need for you to have to take a bath tonight as well."

The devotee's lips quivered with emotion: "Will you give that bucket to me and move out of the way, Amma?"

Mother smiled, hearing in his voice a sense of authority arising out of love.

Mother: "Son, Amma doesn't feel any aversion to cleaning up the excreta of Her devotees. It is a pleasure."

"Don't go after that pleasure now, Amma. Will you give this to me?" the devotee said in a choking voice, as he tried to grab the bucket from Mother's hands.

Often, we see devotees taking liberties with Mother that the residents of the ashram would hesitate to take, but Mother will yield to pure, unblemished devotion.

At the auspicious hour before dawn, the work was finished. To those who observed the life in this ashram, it seemed as if one had to amend the statement in the Gitay In that which is night for all beings, the yogi keeps awake.' Here, night was day, even for those who chose to be with the Yogini.

Saturday, October 19, 1985

FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE BEHIND RITUALS

Mother came down to the kalari in the late afternoon, even though it was not yet time for bhajans. The brahmacharis and some householder devotees were with Her.

The relative of Ottoor, who was staying at the ashram to take care of the elderly man, was ill. For that reason some of the brahmacharis were taking care of Ottoor. In the matter of rituals, Ottoor was usually very particular, and it was difficult to please him. When the conversation turned to that subject, Mother said:

"Amma doesn't know about acharas (customary observances). She didn't grow up observing them. In spite of this, Damayantiamma was very strict. She didn't allow us to form any friendships. But there was one benefit from this: When you are alone, you can sing songs in praise of God. You can talk to Him. When you have someone else with you, time is wasted on idle talk. A speck of dust in one of the washed utensils was enough to make Damayantiamma spank Amma; and if there was a tiny shred of dirt left in the yard after she had finished sweeping, Damayantiamma would beat Her with the broom until the broom itself would break. (Laughing) Maybe it was this kind of upbringing that makes Amma so strict with Her children. She is a terror now, isn't She?

"In those days, after She had swept the front yard, Amma would stand in one corner, imagining that the Lord was walking in front of Her. She would imagine seeing each one of His footprints in the sand as He walked. Whatever She did, there was only the thought of God.

"Children, whatever you are engaged in, you should only be thinking of God. This is the purpose of rituals. Rituals will help foster good habits, and there will be order in life.

Still, we should go beyond rituals; we should not be bound to them until the day we die." A brahmachari: "Isn't it true that rituals cause the mind to flow only outward, and not towards God?"

Mother: "Every ritual was created as an aid to maintain an unbroken remembrance of God. Gradually, it turned into a mere routine. Haven't you heard this story? There was a priest whose cat used to bother him while he did his puja. He was so annoyed by this that one day he put the cat in a basket before the puja began, and freed it when the puja was finished. Soon this became a habit. His son used to help him with this. In due course the old priest died, and the son took over the responsibility of the puja. He never forgot to put the cat in a basket before starting the worship. After some time, the cat also died. The next day, when it was time for the puja to begin, the son was worried. How could he start the puja without putting the cat in the basket? Running outside, he caught the neighbor's cat, put him in a basket, and proceeded. As it wasn't always possible to find the neighbor's cat in time for each puja, he finally went and got a new cat.

"The son did not know why his father had always put the cat in a basket, and he had never asked. He just copied everything his father had done. Rituals shouldn't be like that; we should perform acharas only after grasping the principle behind them. Only then will we benefit from them; otherwise, they will deteriorate into mere routine.

"We should be able to maintain the thought of God in all our actions. For example, before sitting down somewhere, we should touch our seat and bow to it, imagining our chosen deity in front of us. We should do the same thing when we get up. Whenever we pick up anything, we should show reverence in this way, picturing the deity within the object. Thus, if we always maintain this alertness, our minds will stay with God without straying into worldly matters.

"Have you watched a mother who works at a neighbor's house, leaving her baby at home? Whatever she is doing, her thoughts will be on the baby. Will he get too close to the well? Will the other children hurt him in any way? Will he wander into the cowshed and crawl under the cows? Will he go near the kitchen fire? She will always be thinking like this. A sadhak should be like that, constantly thinking of God.

"The brahmacharis here haven't learned any of the rituals. By serving people like him (meaning Ottoor), they will learn something. (Turning to the brahmachari) Son, even if he scolds you, you shouldn't feel any anger. If you get angry, everything you have done will be a waste. You should consider any opportunity to serve a sadhu as a great bless-mg.

HOW TO FACE BLAME AND PRAISE

A brahmachari complained to Mother about the character of one of the householder devotees. This devotee, the brahmachari said, would see the tiniest mistakes of the brahmacharis as grave errors, and did not hesitate to criticize them harshly, without seeing any of their good sides.

Mother: "Son, it is easy to like those who praise us, but we should like those who point out our faults and shortcomings even more. You could say that they are the ones who really love us. When we see our mistakes, we can correct them and move ahead. We should regard those who praise us as our enemies, and those who criticize us as our friends. But let us keep this attitude to ourselves; we need not reveal it to anyone. It*s true that this is a very difficult attitude to cultivate. Be that as it may, we have set out to realize the Self, not to realize the body. Don't forget that.

"Praise and blame are on the physical plane, not on the plane of the Self We should be able to see praise and blame as being equal. We had best learn not to lose our mental poise, whether we receive love or anger, praise or blame from others. That is real sadhana. We can progress only if we succeed in this."

Br: "Amma, why did you say that we should see those who praise us as enemies?"

Mother: "Because they take us away from our goal. We need to understand this and proceed with discrimination; it doesn't mean that we have to dislike anyone.

"All living beings are looking for love. As long as we search for worldly love, we will suffer, just as a firefly perishes in the fire. All quests for worldly love end in tears. That is the story of our lives at present. Real love cannot be found anywhere; there is only artificial love. It is like the lights used by a fisherman. He casts the net, turns on the bright lights, and waits. The fish come, attracted by the lights. Soon the net is full, and the fisherman fills his basket. Everyone loves another from a selfish point of view.

"When others love us, we get close to them believing that they will give us peace; but we don't see that the honey they offer us is a drop on the tip of a needle. If we try to enjoy the honey, the needle will pierce our tongues. Therefore, know the truth and go forward. Know that we have no friend but God; then we won't have to be sorry."

The earth and sky bathed in the golden radiance of the evening sun. Soon the western sky turned deep red.

"The fishermen who go to the sea will be very happy tonight," Mother said, pointing at the glorious red color. "They say that means a big catch."

Someone started playing the harmonium, and Mother took Her seat inside the kalari. Soon, She was completely withdrawn from the external world. She assumed the mood of the pure devotion of a seeker in solitude. The bhajans started with 'Kumbhodara varada..,

'O Thou with a big belly.
And the face of an elephanty Giver of boons.
Son of Shiva, Lord of the Ganas..
O Thou with five hands bestowing boons, Destroyer of sorrows.

Son of Shiva Bless us with Salvation.
Let your benevolent glance Fall on me!

O Primal Lord, who takes us across
The River of Samsara,
Abode of mercy. Giver of auspiciousness,
O Hari Nectar of Bliss, Remover of obstacles,

Show Thy compassion.

The ashram and its surroundings were pervaded with the strains of the sweet devotional music. Everyone was immersed in the ecstasy of bhakti.

Sunday, October 20 1985

A MISHAP CAUSED BY A DOG

"Children, we should love all living creatures, but that love should never harm anyone. We are supposed to go out into the world and serve people; but the compassion we show towards one living being should not end up hurting another. If we are living in an isolated place, we can have dogs or cats or anything else. This, however, is a place where a lot of people come and stay. If we keep a dog here, small children will try to play with it, and they could get bitten. It is better not to keep a dog in an ashram setting."

On hearing Mother's voice, a number of people came and gathered around Her. She had come down from Her room this morning upon hearing loud noises below. Mother s grandmother (Achamma, meaning fathers mother) had gone behind the hut to fetch a long pole for picking flowers from the trees. A dog had recently given birth to a litter of puppies, and the dog was nursing them behind the hut. But Achamma didn't know this. The dog, in her agitation, bit Achamma, who began to cry loudly. The brahmacharis and devotees had gathered around her by the time Mother came down.

Mother: "Poor thing, how will she pick flowers now? The dog has given her a deep bite."

Achamma gathered flowers every day from the neighborhood for the puja in the kalari. She would never break this routine no matter how weak she might feel. In the summer, when it was difficult to find any fresh flowers, she would often see in her dreams where she could find flowers, and her dreams were never wrong. She would find plenty of flowers in those places, and the neighbors rarely objected to her picking flowers on their property.

The ashram residents began discussing the incident.

Br: Rao: "It is Unni who started keeping the dog here. He feeds it rice every day, so why would it want to leave the ashram?"

Mother: "Where is Unni? Call him." Then She saw Unni standing behind Her. "Is this your dog, son? Did you come here to rear dogs?"

Unni: "Amma, several days in a row, as I was washing my hands after eating, I saw the dog waiting by the faucet. I felt sorry for it by the way it stood there."

Mother: "For how long have you been feeding it?"

Unni: "I have fed it occasionally. I didn't think she was going to deliver her puppies here."

Mother: "Does the dog need your permission to give birth to puppies?"

Unni: (Trying to suppress his laughter) "Amma, I felt sorry seeing its starving look."

Mother: "If you insist on feeding it, take it far away somewhere and feed it there. If you had done that, we wouldn't have this problem now."

She continued in a serious tone. "You felt sorry for the hungry dog. Don't you feel sorry now for this old grandmother who is standing here, bleeding from the dog bite? We should see God in everything and offer our service, that is true. It is sadhana. We should show compassion for every living being. But there is a proper environment for everything. This is not the place to keep cats and dogs. Does the poor animal know that this is an ashram or that Achamma was only trying to get that pole? You should be given a spanking for keeping the dog here and feeding it."

Mother took Unni's hands and held them together.

Unni: "Amma, I didn't feed it daily or anything. Just once in a while."

Mother: "No, don't say anything. I am going to tie you up today!"

Without releasing him, She walked over to the dining room. Standing next to a pillar there, she asked a devotee to bring a rope. Knowing that all this was Her leela, the devotee brought a small piece of rope. When She saw the rope. Mother's mood changed. She said, "This rope is no good. If Amma uses it, he'll get hurt. So, maybe we'll let him go this time." She then freed the brahmachari.

Dr. Leela brought Achamma to Mother and said, "Amma, I don't know whether the dog is rabid or not. Shouldn't I give Achamma an injection?"

Mother: "The dog is not rabid or anything. Just put some medicine on Achamma's wound, that's all."

As it was a Sunday, many devotees had arrived. When Mother reached the darshan hut, they crowded around Her. A woman whispered in Mother's ear, "I was scared by Amma's mood this morning."

Mother laughed aloud and planted an affectionate kiss on her cheek. Those who are not familiar with it are bound to feel confused or awed when they see Mother chastising the brahmacharis. On such occasions Her face will become very serious, but they will also be surprised to see the nectar of love and affection flowing from Her the very next moment. Mother is love itself. She does not know how to be angry. She knows only how to love.

THE MOTHER WHO BESTOWS UNSEEN BLESSINGS

Mother asked a female devotee: "Daughter, Amma looked for you the other day. Why did you leave so early?"

A few days earlier, as Mother had come out of Her room, a packet containing some boiled kachil and seasoning was sitting outside the door. Mother tasted a piece and asked a brahmacharini to go and get the woman who had brought the packet. The woman had apparently left and couldn't be found. No one knew who had put the packet on Mother's door.

Devotee: "I was very worried that day, Amma. The deal on a piece of property we were buying was to be closed that day. I had promised to be at the court at eleven with the money. Still, even after pawning my bangles and chain, we could not raise enough cash. We asked several people, but no one would help. If the deed wasn't registered by eleven, we were going to lose the advance deposit we had made. Anyway, I thought I would go and see Ammachi in the morning, and I brought some boiled kachil with me. It was nine-thirty when I got here, and someone told me that Amma would come out only later. If I got to the court before noon, I could ask for a refund of at least half of the deposit even if the deal didn't go through. So I left the packet at Amma's door and went away. I cried a lot. I had hoped that with Amma's blessing, I would get at least half of the deposit back.

"When I got to Ochira, I saw an old friend of mine waiting for a bus. Her husband works in Saudi Arabia. Since I happened to meet her, I thought I might as well ask her for help. I explained the situation: 'If I don't have ten thousand rupees before noon, the deal will collapse.' By Amma's grace, she had exactly that much money with her! She had just been paid back a loan she had made to someone, and she was returning home after collecting the money. She gave me the money without a word, and I broke into tears. The deal went through, just by Ammachi's grace!"

The woman's eyes were brimming with tears. Mother embraced her tightly and wiped her tears with Her sari.

THE INNER TREASURE

There was going to be a puja in a devotee's house. The brahmachari who was going to perform the worship, came to receive Mother's blessing before going there.

Mother blessed him and said: "Son, there is an anthill at their place. Following someone's advice that it shouldn't be destroyed, they are guarding it. Amma doesn't think it is very important. Even if we do all the right things, if the devotees don't have proper faith and a sense of surrender, they will not get any benefit. Some people may blindly believe in something, and they won't budge from that belief, however much we explain things to them. So we have to get down to their level and do what is needed. At this stage, whatever gives them peace is what is appropriate.

"That does not mean that we should leave them to their blind beliefs. So, say to them: 'This anthill will not bring you any harm, but there is no need to leave it like this. Keep just a small piece of it in your puja room. You can destroy the rest. If it keeps growing, you will just waste that much space.' At the end of the puja, take a little of the sand from the anthill and give it to them to keep in the puja room."

Mother told the devotees around her: "Once somebody came here with a similar story. There was an anthill near his house. An astrologer convinced him that there was a treasure under it, and that he could find it if he did some pujas. He sought the help of countless astrologers and others to extract the treasure. Many of them promised to help him and took a lot of his money, but he didn't find any treasure. Finally he came here. His only question was when he would find the treasure, not whether there was any treasure at all. What could Amma say? He was angry at Her for telling him that there was no treasure. 'All the astrologers I saw told me there was a treasure. If you can't see that, why should I come here?' Having said this he left. His mind was filled with the dream of a treasure. What could we do? Amma told him there wasn't any treasure, but he couldn't accept it.

"Soon thereafter he came back. He had an experience that brought him back." Mother laughed. "Now he is interested in the inner treasure, not in the treasure outside. Had Amma rejected him in the beginning, his figure would have been dark. Therefore, when such people come, we should find out their level of understanding, and go to that level to begin with. Gradually, we can introduce them to spiritual ideas and viewpoints.

"Everyone wants the outer treasure. For that, they are willing to go to any amount of trouble. Nobody wants the inner treasure. We have a treasure within us that we will never lose, and that no one can steal; but we will not find it by searching on the outside. We have to look within. We have to offer the flower of our heart to God."

Climbing the stairs to Her room. Mother gave them a sweet smile to keep in their hearts. Some of them may have wondered what the 'flower of the heart' fit to offer Her would be like. Cherishing Mother's sweet smile, a few recalled a song that Mother often sang about the flower to be offered to the Divine Mother, 'Pakalonte karavalli thaxhukatha pushpam...'

The flower that is not caressed by the rays of the surya The flower that is not stolen by the wind in stealth The mind is that flower ₹€” it is a full blossom.

The mind not stained at all by desire. The mind that doesnt throw flames of angery The flower that is not offered in love to a maiden. That is the mind the Divine Empress dwells in.

The mind that gives your life its full meaning. The mind that yearns for the welfare of others,

The mind that is filled with love unblemished. That mind is worn as a garland by Mother!

The strength you seek is within you. Give up this tottering search, O mind! Go forward boldly to the goal of your life, As selfishness fades, there Mother will shine.

When all is surrendered, there is a soul, Free of false pride, filled with peace. That is a light that cant be captured in words. There Mother Divine will dance forever!

Wednesday, October 23, 1985

INITIATION FROM THE GODDESS OF LEARNING

On this day, Vijaya Dashami day, devotees started arriving early in the morning with little children who were to receive their first lessons fi-om the Goddess of Learning Herself. Most of the

devotees were mothers from the nearby coastal areas. People from far away had arrived two days earlier and were staying at the ashram. Mother came to the meditation room with some of the children who had already placed their books in the pile at the spot where the puja to Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, was about to be performed. Many devotees had already taken their seats in the room. A festive atmosphere prevailed throughout the ashram.

There was not enough space in the meditation room for everybody at the same time. "Little children, come first!" Mother called.

The children gathered around the pile of books, holding tulsi leaves in their hands.

Om mushika vahana modaka hasta
Chamarakarna vilambtta sutra
Vamanarupa maheshwara putra
Viswa vinayaka pahi namaste

O Lord Ganesha, who rides on a mouse,
Who has sweet modaka in his hands.
Whose ears are like a hand fan.
Who removes all obstacles. Kindly protect me,
I bow down to you.
Saraswati namastubyam Varade Kamarupini
Vidyarambham karishyami Siddhir Bharata me sada
O Saraswati (Goddess of Wisdom), As I begin my studies,
I bow down to You,
Who are the giver of boons Who has an enchanting form. May I succeed always.
Padma putra vishalaksht
Padma Kesara varnini
Nityan padmalaya Devi
Sa mam pat a Saraswati.

Salutations to Saraswati,
Whose eyes are large
Like the leaves of the lotus;
Whose complexion is saffron
Like the stamen of a lotus.
And who constantly resides in the lotus.

Many tender voices echoed the mantras that Mother recited line by line, praising Lord Ganesha and Devi Saraswati.

Mother: "Now all of you children, imagine that you see your favorite deity in front of you. Kiss those divine feet and prostrate."

Mother prostrated first, and the children followed Her example. Many more children were waiting outside.

The brahmacharis sat down on the south side of the room to begin the bhajans. Mother took Her seat on the north side with a plate full of raw rice in which the letters of the alphabet were about to blossom from the fmger tips of the waiting children. Taking their turn, the parents brought their children to Mother, so that she could guide their first steps into the world of knowledge. One by one. She put each child on Her lap, and calmed them with a piece of candy. Everyone in the room watched with fascination as Mother guided the tiny fingers of the children and made them write a few letters in the rice.

"Hari!" Mother said. The little child sitting in Her lap, decked in his new mundu (dhoti) with gilded borders, and wearing sandal paste on his forehead, looked into Her face, as if wondering what was going on.

Mother prodded him: "Hari!' Say it, 'Ha..ri!'"

The child faithfully repeated, "Hari, say it, Hari!" Everyone including Mother burst into laughter.

Many of the children started to cry as they came to Her, but She wouldn't let any of them go without making them write in the rice. Meanwhile, bhajans in praise of the Goddess of Learning echoed the sentiment in the hearts of the parents:

O Saraswatty Goddess of all learning
Give us your blessings!
Scholars we are not.
Dull-witted we are
Just puppets in your hands!

Mother does not like Her children giving Her dakshina (a traditional offering made to someone conducting worship or a ceremony). Nevertheless, the parents wanted their children to give Her something on this occasion. Many poor parents from the coastal area had brought their children, and they were unable to offer anything comparable to what many others could. To make sure that they didn't feel hurt. Mother decided that it was enough if everyone offered just one rupee to honor the custom, and that was to be placed in front of the picture of Saraswati. She did not want any of the mothers to feel sorry that their children could not offer a dakshina equal to others. It was eleven o'clock by the time all the little children had been initiated into the alphabet.

Afterwards, Mother came out into the yard. The householders and brahmacharis were sitting there in rows. Mother sat down with them and called out, "Om." Everyone repeated the primordial syllable and wrote it in the sand.

"Om."

The lesson continued: "Hari Shri Ganapataye Namah!" Finally, to enhance the sweetness of the learning, all the devotees received prasad from Mother's hands.

By noon, many of the visitors went home. All were happy after receiving instruction from the Mother of all learning. The brahmacharis were sitting here and there, repeating their lessons or reciting Vedic mantras. Having been unable to unload their burdens of sorrow in Mother's lap, due to the festivities, many devotees waited with anxious eyes. The tireless Mother gathered them all and went to the darshan hut.

GIVE TO THOSE WHO ARE IN NEED

Janaki, from the town of Pandalam, was talking to Mother. A retired teacher. She frequently came to see Mother. She was worried about the behavior of her eldest son.

Mother: "How is your son now?"

Janaki: **You have to straighten him out, Amma. I can't. What can I do if someone his age cannot take care of his own life?"

Mother: "That is what happens when you show too much affection towards children."

Janaki: "He has plenty of time for his friends and neighbors. If anyone talks to him about their money problems, he is ready to help, even if it means robbing our house. I am retired now. It is sad if he can't look after himself from now on. What does he get for giving away money like this? Tomorrow, none of these people will even recognize us if we go to them for help."

Mother: "When we give, we should know to whom we are giving. We should give where there is need, and we should give without wishing for anything in return. If we give to get something in return, isn't that a form of bargaining?

"We should recognize those in need and help them. We should give to those who have lost their health and cannot work any longer, those who are handicapped, children who have been abandoned by their parents, those who are sick but don't have the resources for treatment, those who are old and have no family to help them. That is our dharma, and we should not expect anything in return for our help. But we should think twice before giving to those who are healthy and are able to work. If we give them money, they will just become lazier. And if many people give to them.they'll have a lot of money, won't they? They will waste it on alcohol and drugs. If that happens, we are the ones who accrue the sin from their actions; for if we hadn't given them the money, they wouldn't have committed any of those mistakes.

"We can give a share of our food to those who are hungry. We can give medicine to the sick. We can give clothes to those who need protection from the cold. If someone can't find a

regular job, we can have them do some work and then give them some financial help. If we become poor by thoughtlessly giving away money to others, we can't blame God for that.

"It is all right to give money to ashrams and other institutions that serve the world. They will not waste that money. Institutions like ashrams spend money on charitable projects; but even in this case, we ourselves should not give just to become famous for giving. We should see it as an opportunity to serve God. The merit from giving a gift will come to us, in any event. When we make a gift, only we should know about it. Isn't there a saying that the left hand shouldn't know what the right hand is doing?"

Wiping the woman's tears, Mother hugged and consoled her saying, "Stop worrying, daughter. Amma is here for you!"

Janaki: "Amma, let him give everything away to whomever he wants. I have no complaints. But I don't have the strength to see him beg for small change some day. You should take me away before then, Amma."Mother: "Don't cry, daughter. You will never have to see that. You will never lack anything. Isn't Amma with you always?" Mother hugged her again, and gave her a kiss.

NO POVERTY FOR THE TRUE DEVOTEE

As soon as the woman withdrew from Mother, with a peaceful smile brought on by Mother s kiss, the next devotee, a man named Divakaran, was in Her lap.

Mother: "When did you come, son? Amma didn't see you while giving prasadam to everyone."

Divakaran: "I wanted to come this morning, Amma, but the bus was late and I got here only now."

Mother: "There was another son with you last time."

Divakaran: "Yes, that was Bhaskaran. He is always in difficulty, Amma. He has been going to the temple at Sabarimala regularly for the last seventeen years. There are very few temples that he doesn't visit, yet his poverty and other problems haunt him as much as ever. When I see his case, I even wonder why we should think of God."

Mother: "Son, if we take refuge in God fully, only good things will happen to us, materially and spiritually. There is no record of any mahatma starving to death. The whole world goes down on its knees before them. Someone who takes ultimate refuge in God will not have to suffer from poverty. The main reason for our present suffering is that we don't surrender fully to God. Our devotion is not devotion for its own sake; it is to fulfill our desires. But desires lead to sorrow."

Another devotee: "Didn’t Kuchela have firm devotion for the Lord? Still he had to suffer poverty."

Mother: "It is not right to say that Kuchela suffered because of his poverty. How could he find time to experience any sorrow, constantly immersed as he was in the thought of God? His pure devotion gave him the ability to remain blissful even in the midst of poverty. Because of his surrender to God, even the poverty, which was a part of his prarabdha (karma), disappeared. Kuchela did not collapse under the weight of poverty, nor did he forget God in an excess of joy when all the riches came to him.

"If we take refuge in God, without any desires. He will give us everything we need, when we need it. When we surrender to Him with the attitude that He will take care of everything, then we don't need to fear anything. There will be prosperity and happiness everywhere. The Goddess of Prosperity will be the servant of the one who has pure devotion. But what kind of devotion do we have now? We say we go to the temple; but no one goes there just to see the Lord. Even in His sacred presence, we talk only of worldly affairs. What is the need of going to the temple if all we do is talk about our family and neighbors? At least when we are in the temple we should meditate solely on God, surrendering all our burdens to Him, realizing that He is aware of our problems without being told. We shouldn't

A devotee and schoolmate of Lord Krishna go to the temple just to voice our complaints, but to worship and to strengthen the remembrance of God within us.

At this stage of the conversation, some of the other devotees who had remained silent until then, started asking questions.

PUT YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION

A devotee: "But, Amma, you yourself have said that we should open our hearts and tell everything to God."

Mother: "Don't we get some relief when we confide our problems to those who are dear to us? We should feel that same love and closeness to God. We should feel that He is our very own. We need not hide anything from Him. It is in that sense that Amma says we should tell Him everything. It is good to lighten the burden in our hearts by telling God about all our sorrows. We should depend only on Him in all our difficulties. The true devotee never tells anyone else about his troubles; God is his only real relation. Yet it is no use going to God with our hearts filled only with desires and family problems.

"We have to explain the background of our case to the lawyer, only then can he argue on our behalf. Similarly, we have to describe our symptoms to the doctor, only after that can he treat us. But we don't have to go into any details to let God know about our problems. He knows everything. He dwells within us, watching every movement. Itis His power that enables us to see and to hear and to act. It is through His power that we may know Him. We can see the sun only because of His light. What we have to do therefore, is to surrender everything to God and remember Him constantly.

"Our strongest relationship should be with God. If we decide to tell Him about our sorrows, it should only be for the sake of getting closer to Him. It is our faith and surrender to God or guru that removes our sorrows; just describing our difficulties will not be of any use."

A brahmachari sitting nearby raised a doubt: "Amma, is it possible to attain Self-realization just by believing in God?"

Mother: "If you have total faith, that in itself is realizationbut you don't have that. So you certainly have to strive for it and do sadhana. It is not enough to believe in the doctor, you have to take the medicine to get cured. Likewise, both faith and effort are needed. If you plant a seed, it will sprout, but for it to grow properly, it needs water and fertilizer. Faith will make us aware of our true nature; but to experience it directly, we need to put forth the effort.

"There is a story about a father and his son. The son had a disease and the doctor prescribed the extract from a certain plant as a cure. They searched for the plant everywhere, but couldn't find it. They walked around for a long time and became very tired and thirsty. Seeing a well, they approached it, and they found a rope and a bucket next to the well. Many wild plants grew nearby. As he put the bucket in the well to draw water, the father noticed at the bottom of the well the medicinal plant they had been searching for everywhere. He tried to get down into the well, but couldn't. There were no steps, and the well was very deep.

"The father knew what he had to do. He tied the rope to his son's waist and lowered him carefully into the well. ‘pluck up the plants when you get down there,' he told the boy. Some travellers happened to pass by at that moment. They were amazed at the man's action. 'What kind of a man are you who puts a little boy into the well at the end of a rope?' they asked. The father kept silent. The boy reached the bottom of the well and carefully picked the plants. The father pulled him up slowly, and when he got out of the well the others asked, 'How did you get the courage to go down into the well at the end of a rope?' The son answered without hesitation. It was my father who held the rope.'

"The son had deep faith in his father, but it was not until he put it into action, by going down into the well to get the medicine, that he received the benefit of his faith. Children, that is the form of faith we need in God. We should think, 'God is here to protect me, so why should I grieve? I am not even anxious about Self-realization.' We have to have that sort of trust. The devotion of someone who is plagued by doubts at every moment is not true devotion; such faith is not real faith."

FAITH IN GOD AND IN ONESELF

A young man: "Amma, why should we depend on God? Isn't it enough to rely on self-effort? After all, we have all the powers within us. Aren't all the gods created by man?"

Mother: "Son, now we live with the attitude of I and 'mine.' As long as this attitude persists, we will not be able to find the power within us. When there is a curtain across the window, we cannot see the sky. Pull the curtain aside, and the sky will be visible. By the same token, if we remove the sense of I from our minds, we will be able to see the light within us. That sense cannot be removed without humility and dedication.

"To build a canoe, the wood is heated in the fire, so that it can be bent into the right shape. We may say that this shapes the wood into its true form. Similarly, our humility reveals our true form.

"If a thread is thick or out of shape, it will not pass through the eye of the needle. It has to be compressed into a slender shape before it can pass through. That surrender on the part of the thread enables it to sew together countless pieces of cloth. Similarly, surrender is the principle that brings the individual self (jivatman) to the Supreme Self (Paramatman). All this is within us, but in order to bring it out, we need to put forth ceaseless effort.

"We may have a musical talent, but only if we practice regularly can we sing in a way that gives pleasure to the listeners. What we have within us needs to be brought to

the plane of experience. There is no use saying, 'Every-thing is in me.' We take pride in our status, position, and abilities, but we falter when adverse circumstances arise. We lose faith in ourselves. Constant effort is needed to change this.

"We think that everything works because of our powers. Yet without God's power, we are just inert bodies. We boast that we can burn the whole world down by pushing a button; however, don't we need to move the finger to push that button? Where do we get the power to do that?

"There are road signs written with special luminous paint. They glow when the light from approaching vehicles shines on them. This helps drivers to get information about the route and the road conditions. But imagine a road sign thinking. Those cars run because of my light. Could they find their way without me?' When we say 'my power' or 'my ability,' it is similar to that. The sign glows only when the cars' headlights fall on it. In the same way, we are able to move and to act only because of the Almighty's grace and His power. He is the one who protects us always. If we surrender to Him, He will always guide us. With that faith, we will never falter."

It was already noon, and Mother had not eaten anything today. She had been with Her children since early in the morning. This is what happens every day.

Many prostrations to the embodiment of selflessness Who sees the whole world as Her children And who constantly showers Her affection on all.

CHAPTER FIVE

Friday, October 25, 1985

THE MOTHER WHO SHOWERS HER BLESSINGS

Sethuraman, who worked in Assam, and his family came forward and prostrated to Mother. After finishing college, he had not been able to find a job for several years. He had become more and more desperate, and had finally come to see Mother. She had given him a mantra and had told him to chant it a hundred and eight times a day, and to do archana. He followed Mother's instructions to the letter. Three weeks later, his uncle, who worked in Assam, came home on vacation. He promised to arrange a job for his nephew. Sethu left for Assam soon afterwards and was now back home on vacation. His wife was also with him. She was a co-worker whom he had married with the blessings of his family and Mother. Mother Herself had conducted the naming ceremony for their first-born daughter, Saumya. Mother welcomed Sethu's wife and baby into Her arms. Her face beamed with the happiness of a matriarch who welcomes her young daughter-in-law into the family. Sethu stood by as tears of happiness welled up in his eyes.Mother: "Aren't you staying until tomorrow, children?" Sethu: "We were thinking of leaving right away after seeing you, Amma, but we have decided to stay here tonight."

Mother (to a brahmachari standing next to Her): "Give them your room, son." To Sethu, She said, "Amma will see you after bhajans."

The brahmacharis had already taken their seats, and the bhajans started. Prapanchamengum... O Illusory Appearance That fills the whole Universe, O Radiancy won to you Dawn in my heart and stay there Shedding Thy Light forever?

I will surfeit myself Drinking Thy motherly Love, Coming near Thee and Merging in Thy Divine effulgence All my distress will fee!

How long have I wandered Searching for Thee, the Core Of everything; O Mother, Wont Thou come before me and Grant me the bliss of the Self? O won't Thou come?

The stars shone brightly. Mother started digging under some chembu plants looking for edible tubers, but no bulbs were found. On several previous occasions, She had dug up edible tubers. The strains of devotional music from the kalari floated through the air. Mother had been singing, and at the end of one kirtan. She came out of the kalari and went over to the northern side of the ashram. From time to time this would happen. If She got too absorbed in the singing, and felt that She couldn't keep Herself down on this plane, She would try to pull Her mind down into some work. She has often said: "Amma can't sing even one line with total attention. She would lose Her grip! So when She sings one line, She tries consciously to remember the next one. She wonders how Her children can sing bhajans without crying!"

After digging under many chembu plants, Mother found a handful of edible tubers. She washed them, put them in a pot with some water, made a fire, and started cooking them. They were only half-cooked when Mother put a hot piece in her mouth. She gave the rest to Her children and went to Her room.

Mother's prasad came in the form of half-cooked, un-salted, unseasoned pieces of chembu that resembled little sparrow's eggs! As Her children walked to the kalari holding the prasad in their hands, they were just in time for the arati at the end of bhajans. What Mother had said on an earlier occasion blossomed in their minds like a flower blossoming at night: "My children, do you know how much effort Amma has to make in order to stay here in your world?"

An hour after midnight, Mother came down from Her room. A brahmachari was doing japa in the kalari. Seeing Mother in front of him unexpectedly, he prostrated at Her feet. Mother asked

him to call everybody. Everyone felt wide awake upon hearing that Mother was calling, and they rushed to Her side, having no idea why she was calling. She asked them to bring something to sit on and started walking to the seaside.

Everyone knew it was time for meditation. Mother took the brahmacharis to the seashore occasionally to meditate. There was no fixed time for this; it could happen at any hour. Everyone sat around Mother on the beach, and all was quiet except for the deep 'Om...' sound of the sea, and the incessant crashing of the waves against the shore. The lights of the fishing boats twinkled far away in the ocean. Mother chanted 'Om' thrice, and they all responded with an echoing 'Om.' She said, "If anyone is sleepy, stand up and chant your mantra. If you are still sleepy, run along the beach for a little while and then sit down again. This hour, when all of Nature is quiet, is the best time for meditation."

Two hours passed very quickly. At the completion, Mother chanted 'Om' again, which everyone repeated. Following Her instruction, they imagined their chosen deity in front of them and prostrated. Mother sang a hymn in praise of the Divine Mother: Sri chakram ennoru...

The moonlight lit up the sea. The horizon was partly hidden by a thin veil of mist. A few isolated stars shone above. Even the waves seemed to try to be quiet. The white-robed singers on the beach were like a flock of swans that had descended to rest for a while on the shores of time, at the twilight of some ancient epoch. Mother's form glowed in their minds like the white mountain reflected on the still waters of the Manasarovar lake.

Tuesday, October 29, 1985

MOTHER DRINKS POISONED MILK

In the afternoon, Mother called all the brahmacharis to her room. She was sitting in the middle of the room, and there were many packets in front of Her, each containing a variety of sweets.

Mother: "Amma has been wanting to give you children these things for some time, but She hasn't had time to do it until now."

She gave each person some sweets. Noticing that some of the ashramites had not arrived. She asked, "Where are the others?"

A brahmachari: "Two people have an eye infection and are resting."

Mother: "Are they lying down? They can't even walk?"

Br: "They have no trouble walking or anything, but they are afraid that they may give you the infection, Amma."

Mother: "They don't need to worry about that. No matter what the disease you children have, you can still come to Amma. Son, people with all sorts of infectious diseases come to Her for darshan. How many people with eye infections, chicken pox, and skin diseases have come to Her? So far, She has never had to break the regularity of darshan. God has always protected Her. She believes it will continue in the same way.

"Once, a woman devotee brought a glass of milk. Amma drank all of it. A little later She began to vomit. She became very weak due to Her body's loss of water. Yet what She was thinking about was the crowd of devotees waiting for Her darshan. Among them were very poor people who had to work as laborers for many days, and save a few paise daily to have enough for the bus fare to come to see Amma. If they had to go away without seeing Her, when would they get another chance? Amma felt bad when She thought about them. She prayed and then sat up. She called the devotees to Her, consoled them, and gave them the advice they needed. Again by that time. She began to vomit, so She closed the door, sat down on the floor and vomited. A little later She changed Her clothes and resumed giving darshan. After seeing another ten people. She threw up again. When She was too feeble to get up, She imagined that She was singing a kirtan and dancing. That gave Her some energy; but then a little later, She would throw up again, and again give darshan.

"This continued until the morning. She was very weak in the end, although She did hold on until She had seen the last devotee. As soon as She had given darshan to the last person, Amma

collapsed. People carried Her to Her room. Everyone was very worried, fearing that She might die. If Amma had been thinking only of Her own comfort, there would not have been any need for any of that. She would only have had to go to Her room and lie down, and She might have felt better very quickly. But when She thought of the sorrow of all the people who had come to see Her, She couldn't do that. She was ready to die if She had to.

"The milk given to Amma contained poison. A family that was hostile to Amma had given the milk to a devotee to bring here. The woman didn't know that the milk had been poisoned, nor was she aware that the family who gave her the milk was opposed to Amma."

Sometime later Mother distributed sweets to everybody and then went downstairs. She sat down near the water tank on the south side of the meditation room. There were some sugarcane plants growing on the banks of the backwater near that spot. One of the canes was broken, and a brahmachari cut it and brought it to Mother. She cut it into small pieces and gave it to the brahmacharis. Because the sugarcane was growing near salt water, its sweetness had a slightly salty taste. Mother also chewed a couple of pieces.

Throwing out the residue, She said: "Children, when you study the scriptures, you should remember this residue. We spit out the residue after we enjoy the juice of the sugarcane. In the same way, we should take the essence of the scriptures and discard the rest. But it would be foolish to cling to the scriptures until the day we die. We should do the same with the words of mahatmas. We should accept only what we can assimilate and utilize in our own lives. All of their instructions are not equally suitable for everyone. They take into account the particular circumstances and the level of understanding of the person they are advising."

Mother walked towards the kalari. The devotees who were waiting rushed towards Her. She brought them all into the kalari and sat down.

MOTHER'S REAL FORM

A woman devotee prostrated to Mother and then began to sob heavily as she lay in Her lap. Her grief was caused by the taunts she had received from some people on the ferry coming over. Mother wiped her tears and consoled her. Then She said to the devotees:

"If you pinch the trunk of a tree, it won't feel it; but if you pinch a tender new bud it will feel the pain. Amma can bear whatever anyone says about Her; however, if anyone hurts the devotees in any way, if they say terrible things about Her children, She cannot bear it. Even though all are one and the same Atman, Amma cannot stand aside when She sees the suffering of Her children. Krishna did not flinch when Bhishma shot a hundred arrows at him. But when arrows sped towards Arjuna, when His devotee was in danger, didn't Krishna rush towards Bhishma, wielding His chakra? For the Lord, protecting the devotees is more important than keeping a pledge. That is what He has shown us."

A devotee: "Amma, isn't it possible to get rid of those who malign God and berate the spiritual path?"

Mother: "Son, if we have that attitude, we are more harmful than they are. A spiritual person should never think of harming others. His prayer to God should be to make those people goodhearted, and to make them better people. The aim of devotion and prayer is to develop love for everyone. Don't feel bad if anyone speaks ill of you. You have to think that this, too, is for the best. Is there a world without opposites? Isn't it because there is darkness that we know the greatness of light?"

Devotee: "How lucky we are to have come to you, Amma! When we are with you there is only bliss!"

Mother (Laughing): "Don't be so sure of that, children. You are all sick now. You all have wounds that are infected. Amma will squeeze those wounds to get the pus out. She will make your small mistakes look big. Then it will hurt a little."Amma tells Her children, 'Amma likes the Lord of Death more than Lord Shiva. Isn*t it because of their fear of death that people call out to Shiva? Otherwise who would take refuge in Shiva? At least out of your fear of Amma, you will call God." Mother laughed. "Earlier, the brahmachari children used to sing, 'Amme, snehamayi!..' (Mother

who is permeated with love!) Now they sing, 'Amme kruramayiL.! (Mother who is permeated with cruelty!)"

Mother laughed and sang 'Amme kruramayi!.. slowly, to the tune. Everyone bent over with laughter.

Mother continued: "Sometimes, Amma will say that Her children are wrong, even when they are right. Why? Because they need to have shraddha. Then they will watch every step. If Amma were to kick them or beat them, it wouldn't have any effect; they would just stand there smiling. They often say, 'We like Amma to scold us a little. At least we can stand and watch Amma while She does that. It is even better if She spanks us a couple of times.' However, much Amma chastises them, they know that She cannot help smiling at them the next moment. So now, the only thing that works is for Amma to go on a hunger strike. They can't bear having Amma go without food."

No one spoke for a little while. They were all marvelling at the amount of care and affection Mother gave Her children, which would be rare even for the mothers who gave birth to them.

SURRENDERING TO GOD

A woman devotee raised a question: "Amma, you say we have to see God in everything, but how is it possible?"

Mother: "Children, you have to get rid of all the vasanas that are in you. God should become your sole refuge. You have to develop the habit of remembering God, no matter what you are doing. Then, slowly, you will begin to see unity in all this diversity."

A girl came forward and hugged Mother. Putting her head on Mother s shoulder, she began to sob. She was the daughter of a truck driver, and her father was usually not at home. Her stepmother was pushing her towards an immoral life. She had finished high school, but no one wanted her to go to college.

Girl: "Amma, I have nobody! I will stay here and do some work."

Mother's eyes were filled with compassion. She said, "Daughter, God is always present to look after us. He is the abode of compassion. He is our true father and mother. The people we call our parents merely brought us up. If they were our true parents, wouldn't they save us fi-om death? But they are unable to do that. We existed before we became their children. God is our real father and mother and protector."

Mother consoled the girl and gave her confidence. "Go home, daughter, and tell your father firmly that you want to go to college. He will agree. It is Amma who is telling you. Don't worry, daughter, don't worry!"A woman devotee: "I want to come to see you every day, Amma, but I am alone at home. How can I come here leaving the house unattended? Today, I locked the house and, before leaving, entrusted the key with my neighbor."

Mother: "It is good to ask someone to keep an eye on your house when you come here. We do need to pay attention to external things. Nevertheless, don't thefts take place even when we use the most secure locks and employ guards to look after our homes? How can we explain that? In reality, they are not our guards. Our true guard is God. If we place everything in His care. He will stay awake and protect it always. Other guards will fall asleep, and then thieves will not miss the chance to steal our belongings. But with God as our guard, we have nothing to fear!

"Imagine that we get into a boat. We are carrying a heavy bag, and we continue to hold on to it instead of putting it down. Seeing our struggle, the boatman says, 'You are in the boat now. Won't you put your bag down?' We are not prepared to put the bag down; instead, we cry and complain that the bag is too heavy. Is there any need for that? In the same way, why are we carrying all these burdens? Place everything at God's feet! He will take care of all our burdens."

NO TIME FOR SADHANA

Meanwhile, Soman, a teacher, approached Mother with a question: "Amma, after school there are a hundred things to do at home. Where can I find time for japa?"

Mother: "Son, you will find the time if you really want it. You need to have the conviction that there is nothing greater than remembering God. Then you will find the time even in the midst of all your work. Once a rich man went to his guru and complained, Master, my mind has no peace. I am always worried. What can I do?'

"The guru said, 'I will give you a mantra. Chant it regularly.' The rich man replied, 'But I have so many responsibilities throughout the day. Where will I find time to chant the mantra?'

"The guru asked, 'Where do you take your bath?' 'In the river.' 'How long does it take you to get there?' Three minutes.' The guru said, 'Then you can chant the mantra from the time you leave home until you reach the river. Try that.'

"After a few months, the man came back to see the guru in a very enthusiastic mood. He prostrated and said, 'My agitation is gone. My mind is at peace. I regularly chant the mantra you gave me. Now it is impossible for me not to chant! First I started chanting on the way to the river. Then I practiced chanting on the way back and also while bathing. Then I started chanting on the way to work. Then, at the office, whenever the thought of the mantra came to mind, I began chanting. I chant when I go to bed. I fall asleep chanting. Now it is my wish to chant more and more each day. I am unhappy when I am not chanting.'"

Mother continued: "Through constant practice, it became his habit to repeat the mantra. You should start getting up early. As soon as you get up, meditate for ten minutes. After your bath, meditate again for half an hour. In the beginning, it is enough to meditate for a short time. After that, you can do your chores. Before going to your school, meditate again for half an hour. Whatever time is left after meditation should be used for japa. You can do japa while walking or sitting while doing anything at all. Son, Amma is suggesting a discipline like this because you like spiritual life. Beginners need to meditate only for half an hour or an hour. The rest of the time can be used for japa and singing kirtans."

Soman: "Amma, how can I keep my mind on God? I have been married for a year now. I still have to repay the money I borrowed for building our house. My wife is not well. When all these problems bother the mind, how is it possible to do japa and meditation?"

Mother: "That is true. But what is the use of your worrying, son? Will worrying help you get the money to pay off the loan? So get involved in your work. Don't waste any time. Try to chant your mantra all the time. Even if you forget at times, resume the chanting as soon as you remember.

"If you water a tree at the roots, it will go to all the branches and the leaves. If you pour water on top of the tree, it will be of no use. There is nothing to be gained from worrying. Just give your mind to God; take refuge in Him, and you won't lack anything in life. You will be given whatever you need. Your problems will be solved, in some way, and you will find peace. Those who pray to God and meditate on Him sincerely, will not feel a shortage of anything that is essential. That is God's resolve. It is Amma's own experience. If nothing else, chant the Lalita Sahasranama daily with love and devotion. Then, you won't lack anything. My dear children, whatever else you may have, you won't find any peace of mind without doing sadhana. No matter how rich you are, if you want to sleep peacefully, you have to take refuge in God. Even if you forget to eat, don't forget to think of Him."

Complete surrender to God is the essence of Mother's teachings. Whatever our burdens are, if we surrender them to Him, their weight will not crush us. It is in the light of Her own experience that Mother assures us that God will look after us in every way. Her answer to every question of a worldly nature uplifts us to the plane of devotion and spirituality. When Her blissful presence is combined with the sweetness of Her loving words, it becomes an unforgettable experience.

As Mother arose from Her seat, all the devotees prostrated to Her and stood up.

Saturday, November 2, 1985

MOTHER IN ERNAKULAM

Mother and Her group stayed at the house of Her devotee, Gangadharan Vaidyar, near Ernakulam. The next morning they started for the home of another devotee in Eloor. On the way, they visited three more houses.

Many people had gathered in the house at Eloor to see Mother, a number of them for the first time. There were parents with retarded children, people who were maimed in some way, people who had been searching for a job for years, spiritual seekers needing instruction in the method of sadhana, and those who wanted to lead a life of sannyasa at the ashram with Mother.

A devotee came forward with his son, who appeared to be about twelve years old. He prostrated to Mother and, pulling his son close to Her, said, "Amma, this boy is very naughty. He goes to the best school, but he displays his ability only in making mischief, and not in his studies. He is just a child, and yet he goes and asks a girl in his class to marry him. What's more, he beat up the boy who reported this to the teacher. Amima, please bless him and straighten him out."

Mother (hugging the boy): "What is this, son? Is your father telling the truth?" She held her finger up in front of Her nose (In India this indicates shame). The boy was very ashamed and wanted to escape from Mother's grasp. Mother wouldn't let him go. She made him sit on her lap, gave him an apple, and planted a kiss on his cheek. She couldn't talk to his father for long, since She was only staying for a short time at that house. She gave him permission to come and see Her later. He prostrated again and departed.

Mother was already late going to the Krishna temple nearby, where She was to lead bhajans. Nonetheless, She didn't get up before giving darshan to everyone.

After the bhajans. Mother had to go to the homes of a few more devotees. It was very late by the time She got back to Vaidyar s house in Ernakulam. Although She had planned to return to the ashram. She yielded to the insistence of the devotees and decided to stay overnight.

The devotee who had brought his son to Her earlier in the day was waiting there to see Her again, but he was losing hope of seeing Mother that night since it was very late. Suddenly he saw a brahmachari indicating that Mother was calling him, so he went to Her and prostrated.

Devotee: "I had not expected to see Amma at all tonight."

Mother: "Amma had planned to leave tonight, but decided to stay since all the children here insisted. Some children are waiting for Her in Haripad. We will see them tomorrow, on the way back. When Amma came here. She felt you were unhappy. Son, you don't have to worry about your boy; all his mischief will disappear as he grows older."

Devotee: "Amma, but the children today do things that I wouldn't even dream of when I was young. I can't understand the reason for this, however much I think about it."

LET DHARMA BEGIN AT A YOUNG AGE

Mother: "Son, in the old days children grew up in gurukulas under the direct supervision of a guru. They lived with the guru; and they were taught how to respect the guru, how to behave towards their parents, and how to live in this world. They were taught what the essence of God was. Not only were they taught these things, but they were also made to follow them. Service to the guru, tapas, and study of the scriptures were the foundation of their education. Because of this, that age created people like Harischandra.

"What was King Harischandra like? He showed that his word was more important to him than his wealth, his wife, and his child. That is the ideal that the people of old have set before us. It was the result of the education they received. When the children returned from the gurukula after their education and entered grihasthashrama, their parents entrusted them with all the responsibilities of the household, and entered the stage of vanaprastha (forest recluse). Even a king would wear a single piece of cloth and go to the forest to do tapas. He would not retain any of the trappings of royalty. They lived with the goal of sannyasa in mind. In those days, most of the

people had the desire to somehow give up everything and enter a life of sannyasa. Because of this culture, the children became rooted in dharma, and filled with courage as they grew up. They could go forward without faltering in spite of any of life's circumstances."

Devotee: "Amma, but it is just the opposite now. Day by day, our culture is decaying."

A family life, lived according to spiritual principles

Mother: "How can good qualities develop in the children nowadays? Very few householders observe the tenets of their stage of life. How, then, can they instil good qualities in their children? In the old days, the householders led the life of true grihasthashramis. They found time to do tapas even in the midst of all their work. They did not think that life was just for eating and drinking; they ate to live. They gave their children good advice, and they set an example by living in accordance with the advice they gave. But who does such things nowadays? Where are gurukulas? Even in nursery schools, the children are shouting political slogans. There is politics, and even strikes, at schools. One sees, even in children, the readiness to destroy members of opposing parties. Thus they are being brought up in a very destructive manner.

"The son, who ought to nurse and console his father who is old and sick, instead demands his share of the property. When the homestead is divided, his brother's share happens to have a few more coconut trees, so he draws a knife to stab his father. The son is ready to kill his father for a little bit of wealth!

"But what did Sri Rama and others show us? To honour the word of his father, Rama was ready to give up the kingdom. Nor did Dasaratha, his father, deviate from his word. He kept the promise he had given his wife, Kaikeyi. That promise had been given in return for a great sacrifice made by his wife. What had impressed Dasaratha at that time was not his wife's beauty or display of love, but her selflessness in the battlefield, where she risked her life to save him. He did not later go back on his word for some selfish purpose; and Rama unconditionally accepted his father s word.

"What about Sita? Did she make a big fuss when Rama decided to go to the forest? She didn't say to him, 'You shouldn't go to the forest. You are the rightful heir to the kingdom. You should take it by whatever means.' When her husband went to the forest, she followed him quietly. His brother, Lakshmana, also accompanied them. Moreover, what did Bharata show us? He didn't say, 'They have all gone. Now I can rule the kingdom.' Instead, he went in search of his brother. He obtained Rama's sandals, brought the sandals back, and put them on the throne to indicate that he was only ruling the country on Rama's behalf. That is how it was in the old days. That is the model that we should emulate in our lives. But who is paying attention to those values now, or putting them into practice?

"The ancients taught us the true principles, but we don't pay attention to them. Now we see the results of that neglect. What kind of culture do the children get today? You find only TV and movies everywhere. They deal exclusively with romance, sex, marriage, and violence. Magazines and books deal mostly with worldly matters. Children see and read these things. That is the culture our young ones are imbibing today. This will only help to create people like Kamsa. We will rarely see any Harischandras in the future.

"If we are to change this, we have to pay special attention to our children. We must be careful about what we give them to read. We should give them only things that will help them in their studies or explain spiritual matters. What's more, we should even put pressure on them to read such things. That culture (based on spiritual principles) will stay with them when they grow up. Even when they do something wrong, they will know it deep within, and they will come to regret their action. This will change them.

"Many children watch TV and movies, and dream about a married life as depicted in the films. How many people can lead the happy, luxurious life of those stories? When they grow up and get married, and discover that they can't have that, they are disappointed, and this creates a distance between husband and wife. Once a young woman came to see Amma. She had married when she was young and was already divorced. When Amma asked the reason, she told the story. She had seen a movie about a rich couple with a big house, a car, and expensive clothes. In the movie they drove to the beach in the evenings, and there was never a moment that was not filled with happiness. After seeing the movie, the girl began dreaming about all this.

"Soon, she was married, but her husband had only a low-paying job. There wasn't enough money, and he couldn't afford the kind of life his wife desired. She wanted a car, more and more saris, daily trips to the movies, and so on. She was always disappointed. What could the poor husband do? Finally, they began to fight, and even came to blows. They were both unhappy. So the marriage was dissolved, and that brought them more despair than ever. They regretted all that had happened. What could they do?

"Think of the old days. At that time, a husband and wife were ready to die for each other. They really loved each other. Though separate in bodies, they were one at heart. Children, love and selflessness are the wings of married life. They help you to soar high into the sky of joy and contentment."

Mother looks carefully even at those things that others may not consider significant. She ignores Her own comfort and convenience and gives Her children Her utmost attention, suggesting solutions to their problems.

The devotee, who had listened attentively to Mother's words, said, "When I get home, I want to put into practice everything that you have said. Give me your blessings, Amma!"

Mother: "Son, no word or action that is undertaken with shraddha can ever be a waste. If not today, you will get the benefit tomorrow.

"Amma sows the seeds and goes forward. Some of them sprout tomorrow and some the day after. Some seeds may sprout only years later. Even if no one is there to hear it. Mother Nature keeps a record of each of our sincere prayers. Make the effort, children, Amma is with you!"

Sunday, November 3, 1985

RETARDED CHILDREN WHO'S KARMA CAUSES THEIR DISABILITY?

Mother and the brahmacharis started from Gangadharan Vaidyar's house at six-thirty in the morning. On the way, the brahmacharis started talking about the retarded children who had come to see Mother the day before.

"The plight of those children is lamentable. Their bodies are growing, but their minds are not developing at all. What a life!"

"Their parents' situation is even more deplorable. Do they have any freedom in life? Can they leave the children and go anywhere without worrying?"

"Whose prarabdha is this, the child's or the parents'?"

In the end they decided to ask Mother. She had been listening carefully to the conversation.

Mother: "Those children live, more or less, as if in a dream. They are not aware of the suffering that we perceive in them. If they were aware of it, they would feel sorry for themselves thinking, 'Alas, why am I in this world in this condition?' They don't have that awareness. It is their families that suffer, they are the ones who face the difficulties. So we have to think of it as being mainly the prarabdha of the parents."

Br: "Poor parents! What can they look forward to in this life? What can we do for them?"

ADVICE TO THE BRAHMACHARIS

Mother: "Children, this compassion that you feel for them that in itself will bring them peace; and it will expand your hearts as well. We need to feel empathy with those who suffer. The deeper the well is, the more water it can hold. Only compassion will cause the well-spring of the Paramatman to issue forth. That Supreme Principle awakens in us due to our compassion.

"Even when they sit down for meditation, some people are thinking of how to get revenge for something. Children, you cannot build a house just by piling up bricks; you need cement to hold the bricks together. That cement is love. You cannot plate a vessel that is not clean. It first must be rubbed clean. By the same token, only when the mind is pure can devotion take root in it, so that we can enjoy the presence of God. Think of Kuchela. His children were starving and he

went to beg for food. As he was coming back, someone else held out his hand, crying that his family was starving. Kuchela gave him the food he had received.

"Do you know the story of the sage Durvasas and King Ambarisha? The sage went to Ambarisha's to try to break the vow the king had made. If he could do that, he was going to curse the king. But Ambarisha was a sincere devotee. Even though Durvasas got very angry with him, Ambarisha, without reacting in any way, remained in the attitude of a servant towards the sage. He was aware of his own powers, but he did not voice any opposition to the sage. With joined palms, he prayed to Durvasas, please forgive me if I have committed some error. I was only trying to keep my vow. Forgive me for my ignorance.' Durvasas, however, did not forgive him. Instead, he decided to kill him, but before that could happen, Lord Vishnu's sudarshana chakra came to Ambarisha's rescue.

"Terrified by the sudarshana, (divine weapon) Durvasas ran to the gods for help. When the sage had left, Ambarisha, on his part, did not think, 'Oh, good. He is gone. Now I can eat something in peace.' Unable to get any help from the devas, Durvasas had no choice but to seek refuge in Ambarisha himself. Even when the sage came and begged for his forgiveness, the king wanted to wash his feet and drink that water. God is totally with such people. He will come to help those who have that kind of humility. People who think, 'I want to be happy; I want to be rich; I want liberation!' are not going to find God on their side."

Mother stopped talking and sat silently looking out through the small window on the right side of the van. They were speeding past trees and houses. A lorry went by, blaring its horns. All eyes were on Mother. A brahmachari broke the silence, and called, "Amma!"

"Yes, what do you want?" Mother responded in a detached tone.

The brahmachari lowered his tone and said, "I am sorry that I made Amma angry the other day."

Mother: "That is all in the past. Why do you worry about

it now? Amma forgot it right away. Wasn't it out of Her love for you that Amma spoke so sternly then, son?"

Tears started flowing from his eyes. Mother wiped them with the end of Her sari, and said: "Don't worry, my darling."

The other day, Mother had asked him to clean the verandah of the kalari before leaving the ashram, but in his hurry to travel with Her, he had forgotten to do it. Mother noticed the verandah as She was preparing to leave. It was still dirty, so She called the brahmachari and scolded him severely; then She started cleaning the place Herself. Seeing this, some others came to help Her, while the brahmachari stood there with his head hanging in shame. Mother had left the ashram only after cleaning the whole area.

Mother continued: "When Amma says something sternly to you children, it is not because She is really angry; it is only to keep you from becoming egotistical. Amma would like to do all the chores Herself. She would like to do that as long as She is healthy, but Her mind is often beyond this plane, so She tends to forget. It is only because of this that She asks you to pay attention to certain things. Amma would like to wash her own clothes. Even now She tries to do that, but Gayatri doesn't let Her. Amma doesn't like to give any trouble to anyone.

"Amma likes to serve others, not to be served. She doesn't need any service. Nevertheless, sometimes She has to accept it to make people happy. Even then, Amma is thinking only of what is good for you.

"You children are more fortunate than most people. You don't need to worry about anything; Amma is here to take care of all your problems. She is here to listen to your sorrows and to console you. There is a saying that one should go out into the world only after attaining realization, but this doesn't apply to those who have found a satguru. A disciple sent out by a satguru does not have to fear anything. The guru is there to protect him."

A brahmachari who was listening to all this asked: "Amma, you have often said that a person can experience the Self in just three years. What kind of sadhana do you prescribe for that?

TO BE FIT FOR REALIZATION

Mother: "One who has intense yearning doesn't need three years. Why, he doesn't even need the time it takes to pierce a lotus leaf with a needle. But his longing has to be incredibly intense. With each breath, he should be crying out to God, 'Where are you?' He has to reach a state in which he cannot live any longer without attaining God.

"Some people don't gain anything even after doing tapas for fifty or sixty years. If you follow what Amma says, you can certainly attain your goal in three years. But you need shraddha. You need true lakshya bodha and true dedication. Amma is talking about people who have that. If you catch an ordinary bus, you can't be sure when it will reach the destination, because it will stop at a lot of places. But if you catch an express bus, you can tell when it will reach its destination, because it won't stop here and there along the way. We can't be sure of those whose detachment lasts only for two days.

"Son, when the thought that you are born dies, that is Self-realization. When you are aware that you are pure Existence without birth, growth, and death, that is realization. It is not something that you get from somewhere else. You have to get your mind under control‚€”that is what is needed.

"Do you know what Amma's life was like? She wouldn't even leave Her footprints when she swept the front yard. If Her footprints were still there. She would sweep them away. For when everything was clean, God's footprints must form there first! She had the conviction that God was walking there. If She happened to take even one breath without remembering God, She would cover Her nostrils to stop breathing, think of God, and only then resume breathing. While walking. She would take each step only after remembering Him. If, at any step. She didn't do so. She would take a step back, remember God, and then go forward.

"Do you know the story about the man who went in search of Tambran's lion? We have to get that kind of intensity. We should be searching constantly, 'Where are you? Where are you?' Because of the intensity of our search.

it will get so hot everywhere that God will not be able to sit peacefully. He will have to appear before us.

"Before starting meditation, Amma used to decide how many hours She would sit. She wouldn't get up before that. If She couldn't sit for that long, She would charge at Mother Nature, roaring, ready to beat Her up. At night, She wouldn't sleep at all. If She felt sleepy, She would sit there and cry. She usually didn't feel sleepy. When the time came to sleep, She would grieve that one more day had been wasted. Amma can't even stand the memory of that. It was so difficult."

Br: "If a normal person doesn't sleep, wouldn't that disturb his meditation?"

Mother: "One who is pining for the knowledge of God will not stop thinking about Him even for an instant. He will not feel sleepy, nor will he lie down. Even if he does lie down, his grief will keep him awake. Amma is talking about such people. For those who have detachment and the desire to know God, tapas is the real form of rest. There is no rest beyond tapas. Those who do that don't really need sleep. We are aiming for that state."

Br: "Doesn't the Gita say that one who sleeps too much and one who doesn't sleep at all will not attain jyoti (union with the Divine)?"

Mother: "Amma is not saying that you should give up sleep completely. You should get enough sleep but just enough. A sadhak will not be able to sleep when he remembers his goal. He will not lie down to sleep; he will go on with his japa and fall asleep unknowingly. Students who want to pass an examination will not feel like sleeping. They will stay up at night and study. Studying becomes second nature to them. Such an attitude comes naturally to a sadhak.

"The children who really love Amma should imbibe the principles She teaches. They should be willing to sacrifice anything to live according to those principles. Those are the ones who really love Amma. The aim of such a person is to adhere to those principles unfailingly, even if it means facing death. Instead, one who just mouths the words, 'Amma, I love you,' does not really love Her.

"A king has two servants. One of them hangs around the king without attending to any of his duties. The other man spends every hour of the day doing the things the king asks him to do. He toils without food or sleep. He doesn't worry whether the king sees it or knows about it. Who is the better of these two? Whom does the king appreciate the most?"

MOTHER'S TRUE NATURE

Mother continued to speak, further explaining Her own nature: "The river flows by itself. It purifies everything that joins it. It doesn't need the water from a pond. You don't have to love Amma for Her sake. Amma loves each one of you. However, for your own good. She may not always show Her love. Outwardly, Amma doesn't show Gayatri any love; but when Gayatri isn't there, Amma's eyes fill with tears at the very thought of Gayatri, and her hard work and suffering. What Amma loves is that daughter s mind and her actions, and that love comes by itself. Amma is not consciously bringing it on. Yet She doesn't display that love even for a second. She finds fault with everything that Gayatri touches or does. She doesn't even address her as 'mol' (daughter) most of the time.

"Often Amma thinks, 'Am I really so cruel that I cannot show Gayatri any compassion? I am always making her suffer!' Even if Amma decides at night to show Her love to Gayatri the next day, She actually ends up scolding her for something or other. She has woken Gayatri up from her sleep and made her stand up. She has put her outside and closed the door. She has punished her in many ways like this, but all this is not because Amma doesn't love her. Amma's love for Her is complete. Amma is after her mind. But Gayatri has never wavered a bit. That is real prema."

RULES FOR DOING SERVICE

Br. Pai asked a question at this point: "Amma, you often say that a sadhak should not have any close connections with worldly people; and that he shouldn't use their clothes and other belongings, or enter their bedrooms. Then how can he do any service?"

Mother: "There is no harm in doing service, but one should never lose one's shraddha. It is true that everything is the same Self, that all is God, and that God is in everyone and in everything ₹€”but one should act with discrimination according to the circumstances. When a sadhak visits a house, he should avoid going into the bedrooms. If you go to a place where coal is handled, even if you don't touch it, some of the coal will stick to you. It is said that if you go to Kurukshetra, you can still catch the sounds of the ancient battle that took place there. In the rooms used by worldly people, the vibrations of their thoughts will be present. If you spend any time in those rooms, the vibrations will enter your subconscious, and, sooner or later, you will suffer the bad effects of that. So if you visit a home, stay in the puja room as much as possible, and talk to the family members there.

"In your conversation, avoid worldly matters. It is best not to talk about anything that is not spiritually beneficial. Conversation about unnecessary subjects is like a whirlpool; it will pull your mind down without your knowledge. The clothes that others wear will contain the vibrations of their thoughts. Therefore, sadhaks should not wear the clothes used by worldly people. It is not good to use their soap, either; if you give someone your soap, it is better not to take it back. Take the necessary clothes and your asana wherever you go.

"Sadhaks should not maintain unbreakable ties with any one, especially with householders; but our conduct should never hurt anyone. If they insist on something, explain your point in a few words, with a smile. After a certain stage in sadhana, these things will not affect a seeker much. Seekers will remain just as unaffected as a lotus leaf when water falls on it. Even then, one should stay alert."

After visiting the homes of some devotees, and Her ashram branch in Ernakulam, Mother reached Haripad by noon. Prof. N.M.C. Warrier and his family had waited for Her all night, without going to sleep, because Mother had said She would arrive that night. Since they had decided not to eat before She came, no one in the family had eaten anything. Thus Mother had given them the chance for a good meditation. What will God not do to keep the devotees' minds firmly tied to Him?

To welcome Mother, the host's son had drawn some kalams traditional designs on the floor, drawn with rice flour and turmeric powder₹€”and lit an oil lamp in the center of it. Mother looked at the design carefully and said: "There is a small error here. One shouldn't make any mistake while making a kalam. It is said that if you make a mistake, there will be strife in the

family. We should draw these things with a certain sankalpa. Son, you should first practice it on sand. Measure everything and make sure it is correct. Only after you have practiced enough should you draw the kalam. But what you have done is all right, because it was done with a pure heart filled with love and devotion for Amma. Next time, however, you should pay attention."

Mother visited five more houses in Haripad. Whenever She goes to a house, the neighbors invite Her to visit them also. No matter how tired She is, and in spite of the pressure others put on Her to take some rest, Mother will go to all the houses. In the bliss they derive from the dust from Her holy feet sanctifying their homes, the devotees tend to forget Mother s difficulties.

When Mother arrived at the ashram. She found that many devotees had been waiting for Her since morning. Although She was very tired physically, Mother did not break the schedule of bhava darshan.

Monday, November 4, 1985

At three in the afternoon, Mother was in Br. Srikumar s room, sitting beside him on his bed. He had suffered a fever for the last two days. A brahmachari brought a container with hot water, so that Srikumar could take a steam bath. The container was covered tightly with a banana leaf that had been tied across the opening.

Mother: "Get down on the floor, son. Get some steam, and then you will feel better."

A straw mat was put on the floor, and Mother helped Srikumar sit up on the bed. She held his hand and made him get down onto the mat. He was covered with a thick sheet.

Mother: "Son, break the cover of the pot now. Steam yourself until you sweat really well; then the fever will go."

Some devotees who had come for Mother s darshan came to the hut upon hearing that She was there.

Mother: "Sri mon (My son, Sri) has had a fever for two days now. Amma thought of giving him a steam treatment. When did you children come?"

A woman: "A while ago, but we just found out that Amma was sitting here."

Mother removed the sheet that was covering Srikumar. He had sweated enough. She helped him to get back on the bed and to lie down. Mother talked to the devotees, and after some preliminary exchanges, the conversation turned to more serious matters.

VEDANTA - THE TRUE AND THE FALSE

A devotee: "Amma, the other day a friend of mine visited me. He is in love with the wife of a friend of his. While talking about it he said, 'Kabirdas gave away his wife when someone asked him, didn't he? So what is wrong with that?'"

Mother: "But didn't Kabirdas happily give his wife away to the one who asked? He didn't betray his friend and steal his wife. Let this person who talks Vedanta ask his friend if he is ready to give away his wife. If he asks, he may not be around much longer." Mother laughed.

"Kabir was a righteous person. For him, dharma was greater than his wife or himself So he didn't hesitate. His habit was to give whatever anyone asked for. He didn't budge from his dharma, even when someone asked for his wife. But a wife has her own dharma. A wife who is really devoted to her husband won't even look at another man's face.

Ravana stole Sita. He tried to tempt her in so many ways, but she didn't waver. She thought only of Rama. She decided that she would not yield to another man, even if it meant she had to die. That is a wife's dharma.

"What we see in Kabir is the sign of a liberated being. He had given up all notions of I and 'mine.' 'Everything is the Self or God'â€”this is the attitude a spiritual person should have. He should see everything as God, or else he should see everything as his own Self From one point of view, everything is God; so there can be no hatred or anger towards anyone, there is only worship. From another point of view, nothing is distinct from our own Self; there is no second person. Remove the boundary between two fields, and there is only one field. We see ourselves in everything. Just as the right hand comes to dress the wound on the left hand, we see another man's sorrow as our own, and we come to his aid."

A brahmachari was going to Ernakulam for a few days to make some purchases. He picked up an umbrella from the hut. It had no handle and the cloth had faded a little, so he put it back. There was a new umbrella hanging behind the door. The brahmachari took that one instead. He prostrated to Mother and went out of the hut, ready to start his trip.

Mother called him back. She took the new umbrella from him and asked him to take the old one he had looked at. The brahmachari did so without any hesitation and left. Everyone watching was perplexed by this. When asked about it, Mother said: "He didn't want the old umbrella, only the new one. A brahmachari's mind should not be trapped by external glamour. It is to get rid of the attachment to luxuries that you live in the ashram."

But a few moments later. Mother asked someone to call the brahmachari back. She took back the old umbrella and gave him the new one. He prostrated to Her again, and then stood up.

Mother: "Son, a spiritual seeker shouldn't go after external beauty. That is perishable. It will ruin him. He should look at the inner beauty, which is eternal. That will make him grow. Only if he totally discards the outer trappings, can he make progress. Amma is giving you the new umbrella back, because She sees in you an attitude of surrender that lets you accept the good and the bad equally. You chose the better umbrella to get the approval of others, didn't you? Don't be attracted by the praise of others. If you wait for the certificate of approval from others, you won't receive a certificate from God. What we really need is God's certificate. For that you have to withdraw the mind that is looking outward, and turn it inward. You have to search and discover that which lies within.

"I will pay attention to every side of my children's lives. I will look even at the little things. Who is there but Amma to rectify even your smallest mistakes? But your attention should not be on external matter. Your mind should be focused on God."

If Mother is there to pay close attention to even the seemingly unimportant things in Her children's lives, then why should they attend to external things? This is Mother's attitude.

MOTHER'S BHAKTI BHAVA

Mother: "Amma's voice is gone after these last two or three days of travel. There was no rest. Now it is difficult to sing bhajans. Amma hasn't had this much trouble at any time in all these years. What is the use of the tongue, if one can't sing bhajans?"

Br: "You took upon yourself the prarabdha of those who came to see you at Eloor, Amma. That is what caused this. Many sick people came there, and they were not the same when they went back. They went away smiling."

Mother: "If my pain is the result of their prarabdha, if I am now suffering what they were meant to suffer, then I am not unhappy. After all, someone else is being cured. But even then, I cannot spend a day without uttering God's name."

Mother suddenly began to weep. The tears were streaming down Her face. She was the true picture of a devotee who was lamenting with an aching heart Her inability to sing God's name. The surrounding atmosphere, bathed in the crimson hue of dusk, seemed to mirror Her sorrowful mood. Mother's supreme devotion enhanced the radiance of Her face. Her sobbing gradually subsided. Mother slipped into a state of samadhi, which lasted for an hour.

Everyone present had a lesson from Mother on how to call out and cry for God. A little while after returning from the samadhi, Mother went to the kalari and joined the bhajans.

Kannante Kalocha...

I heard Kannans footsteps On a silvery moonlit night.
I heard the notes of his flute. And my mind merged
In a golden dream!
O Fragrance of Winter,Blossoming in the whiteness
Of the silvery moon! My mind dances blissfully
In that honey-sweet smile!O Kanna,

I have countless tales to tell. Kanna, please don t go! Please stay for a bath
In the blissful lake of my mind!

When Mother returned to her room, a brahmachari was waiting for Her. His eyes were swollen, and his whole face had changed.

Mother: "What happened to you, son?"

Br: "It started this morning. My face is swelling up."

Mother: "There is nothing to fear. There is swelling because some dust has fallen in your eyes."

Mother asked a brahmacharini to bring some rose water. When she brought it, Mother asked the brahmachari to lie down on the floor. She gave him Her pillow to put his head on. But he was reluctant to place his head on it.

Mother: "True reverence for Amma is not refraining from using these things because they belong to Her. Amma doesn't see it that way. The sign of reverence for Amma is in your obedience to Her."

She put the reluctant brahmachari's head on the pillow and poured some rose water in his eyes. She asked him to lie still for a while.

Friday, November 8, 1985

BRAHMA MUHURTA

The morning star rose. As the brahmacharis got up, the lights from their huts filtered out through the gaps in the thatched-leaf walls. Mother passed in front of each hut, with a flashlight in hand, to check whether Her children were up. Most of the brahmacharis had taken their bath. Vedic mantras echoed in the air.

There was no light in one of the huts, so Mother shone the flashlight inside. The brahmachari was sound asleep. Mother tugged at the corner of the sheet that covered him. He turned over onto his other side, pulled back the sheet, and covered himself again. Mother was enjoying this. She pulled the sheet again. He pushed away Her hand that was holding the sheet and curled up again. Getting some water in a cup from outside and approaching Her son again, Mother sprinkled water on his face.

He jumped up and looked around with irritation at his broken morning slumber. Two piercing eyes were in front of him. Even in his state of half-asleep, it didn't take him any time to recognize that form clad in pure white. He stood up trembling. When She saw that he was up, Mother's smile faded. She now wore a serious mask.

Mother: "During archana, all the deities come here. Are you lying here to get their curse? If you can't even get up in the morning, why come to live in the ashram? Why not go and hitch up with some girl and live happily? When the children cry day and night for something, you will have to sing to them and put them to sleep on your shoulder. Only then will people like you learn."

Mother was not ready to stop Her tirade. "How many days has it been since you went to archana?"

The brahmachari said, faltering: "Two days." He couldn't raise his head and look at Mother.

"You should be ashamed to say that. Even Achamma, who is past seventy, gets up at 4:30."

The brahmacharis who were now returning from the archana caught a glimpse of Mother in Her aspect as Kali. They prostrated in front of Her. As Mother came out of the hut, Her mood changed completely. She put on a pleasant, smiling, auspicious face. She sat down with Her children near the darshan hut. Where was that ferocious mood seen just seconds ago? Within an instant, Her lotus face had blossomed with a smile of tender love.

Mother: "I asked him why he is staying here if he can't obey the ashram rules and do his sadhana. It must have hurt him. It pains Amma to scold you children, but it is Amma's rebukes, more than Her love, that removes the impurities in you. If Amma shows only love, you won't look within. Amma's rebuke is nothing but Her love for you. It is Her compassion. It is real love, children. You may be upset when Amma chastises you, but Amma is doing it to weaken your vasanas, and to awaken your real Self. There is no way to remove the vasanas without a little pain.

"The sculptor chips away the rock with his chisel, not because he is angry at the rock, but to bring out the real form that is inside. The blacksmith heats up the metal and beats on it, only to give it the desired shape. Similarly, for an infected abscess to heal, you have to squeeze it and get the pus out. Sometimes, the doctor may cut it open. Those who observe this may think that the doctor is cruel. But if, out of his affection for the patient, the doctor just puts on some medicine without hurting him by opening the abscess, it will not heal at all. In the same way, the guru's

rebukes and disciplining may give some pain to the disciple, but his aim is only the removal of the disciple's vasanas.

"Children, when the cow chews on the young coconut sapling, it's no use telling it gently, 'Don't eat it, my dear.'

But if you shout at the cow, 'Shoo! Go away! the cow will stop eating the plant and move away. Amma's word has to make the intended transformation in you. That is why Amma takes on such a serious mood."

For the ashram residents, who but Mother was there to love them and scold them, and even to wield the cane and give them a taste of it if necessary?

Mother remained silent for a few moments and then continued: "Children, if you are upset, Amma will stop scolding you. Amma likes to see you happy. She doesn't want to hurt you."

Hearing these words, the brahmacharis' hearts fluttered. Each time Amma took them to task, their love for Her deepened further, and their bond with Her only became stronger.

Mother got up and walked to the dining room. She continued talking to the brahmacharis who were following Her like a shadow.

Mother: "Amma is not talking in this serious tone with the intention of hurting you. It is to let you see for yourselves how strong your bond with Amma is. Only those who are willing to stay on, in spite of even being beaten and killed, will progress. A brahmachari has to carry the whole world on his shoulders, so he should not be weakened by little things. I will really shake my children up. Those who desire only Self-realization will stay, the others will leave."

MOTHER RECOUNTS SOME OLD STORIES

In the kalari, the evening bhajans were in progress.

For several days, Ottoor had been hoping to spend some time with Mother. Now, he slowly walked to Mother s room. He became very happy when he saw Her. She took hold of his hand to make him sit next to Her. Ottoor prostrated to Her and putting his head in Her lap, lay down like a little baby. Mother affectionately stroked his back. Ottoor s nephew, Narayanan, and another brahmachari were also in the room.

Lifting his head from Mother's lap, Ottoor said, "The brahmacharis come and tell me the stories about the old days. My regret is that I was not fortunate enough to see those things with my own eyes. Amma, it would be enough if I could listen to you recount those stories. They told me that your family tied you up and beat you. When I heard that, little Ambadi Kanna, came to mind. Why were they beating you?"

Mother laughed and began recounting: "In those days, Amma used to bring food to the poor people around here, even if She had to steal the food from home. That was why they beat Her. Amma would go to the houses of those neighbors to collect tapioca skins and kadi (the water from rice gruel) to feed the cows. In most of those houses the people were starving, and Amma felt sorry for them. At home, when no one was watching. She would take a pot and put some boiled rice in it. Pretending to go for kadi,Krishna

She would take the rice to the starving neighbors. In some families, the grandmothers weren't being given soap or other necessities, so Amma would bring them soap from Her own home. She would also wash their clothes for them."

Ottoor: "Oh, they were people who must have earned much merit. They could take part in Amma's leelas!"

Mother: "Amma did all these things; but later She felt an intense detachment from everything. She didn't like anyone coming near Her and hindering Her meditation. She felt an aversion towards everything. She couldn't even stand Mother Nature. She hated Her own body, so She would bite and wound it. She even pulled out Her own hair. It was only later that She would remember that she had done those things to Herself."

Ottoor (with surprise): "Did your parents see all these things?"

Mother: "When Amma's father saw her crying loudly, he would come and lift Her up, holding her on his shoulder. He had no idea why Amma was doing these things or crying. One day,

Amma told him, 'Take me to some secluded place. Take me to the Himalayas!' and She started crying. Amma was very young then. Her father put Her against his shoulder to stop Her crying, and said, 'I will take you there soon. Get some sleep now, my child!'"

Suddenly Mother slipped into a state of deep samadhi. Her hands were still, locked in some mystical mudra. Only the sweet rhythm and harmony of the bhajans from the kalari broke the silence. Amba Mata Jaganmata..,

O Divine Mother,
Mother of the Universe,
O most courageous Mother,
Giver of Truth and Divine Love!
O Thou who art the universe itself
Thou who art Courage, Truth, and Divine Love

As the bhajan reached its crescendo, the brahmacharis were totally immersed in the singing, forgetting everything else. Mother remained in the state of samadhi. Slowly the song came to an end. The instruments fell silent while the harmonium was tuned for the next kirtan. Mother slowly came out of Her sublime mood and assumed Her normal state. The conversation continued.

Ottoor: "How old were you then?"

Mother: "Seven or eight. Amma's father held Her on his shoulder and walked around. Hadn't he said that he would take Her to the Himalayas? She believed him totally, just as any child would, and She fell asleep on his shoulder. When She awoke. She started crying again, seeing that he had not taken Her to the Himalayas. Back then, my father went through a lot of trouble. I would meditate, sitting in the courtyard at night without sleep. Father would also stay up watching me. He was afraid to leave his daughter there alone at night.

"Amma used to go and gather branches to feed the goat.

There was a large tree leaning over the water. She would climb the tree and sit there. Suddenly, She would feel that She was Krishna, and She would sit in the tree swinging Her legs. Quite naturally. She would begin to make the sound of a flute. As She broke some branches from the tree and dropped them to the ground, other girls would pick them up, and Amma would imagine that they were the gopis. These thoughts came to Her mind naturally. She would wonder whether She had gone crazy.

"Because Her family didn't like Her to mingle with others, Amma usually went alone to fetch water. One day She suddenly climbed the banyan tree and lay there on a branch, like Lord Vishnu lying on Ananta." It was a very slender branch, but it didn't break. That tree is still there on the seashore."

Ottoor: "You would climb up and lie on a thin branch?"

Mother: "Yes. Just like the Lord resting on Ananta. Those who watched used to say, for example, that there were different colors on Amma's body. Amma doesn't know. That was probably their faith. Amma cannot even think of that world now."

Ottoor: "I would like to hear the story of when Amma turned water into panchamritam"

Mother: "Amma made those who had no faith in Her do it themselves. She didn't touch anything.

"At that time there were many people who didn't be-

A large serpent representing Time A nectar-like substance lives in Amma. It was the period when the bhava darshan had just started. Amma asked some of the people who opposed Her to bring some water, so they brought water in a jug, She asked them to imagine that the water was being transformed. Right there and then, as they held it in their hands, the water turned into panchamritam."

The bhajans ended in the kalari. The mantra invoking peace resounded everywhere.

Om purnamadah purnamidam
purnat purnamudachyate
purnasya purnam adaaya

purnam evavashishyate
Om shantiy shanti, shantihi Om
Shri gurubhyo Namah! HariOm!

That is the Whole, this is the Whole; From the Whole, the Whole arises; Taking away the Whole from the Whole, The Whole remains. Peace, Peace, Peace! Salutations to the gurus! Hari Om!

For a few moments, there was silence everywhere. Then the bell for arati began to ring. Narayanan helped Ottoor get up, and they walked off to the kalari to observe the arati. The brahmachari walked back to his room with a feeling of awe and gratitude at having witnessed that scene, in which loving devotion on one side, and deep motherly affection for the devotee on the other, combined so beautifully.

Eternal Wisdom

UPADESHAMRITAM

The wisdom of the mahatmas who have come with the mission of uplifting the world has both immediate and eternal meaning. Even though they elucidate values that are everlasting, they are attuned to the call of the times in which they live, and their words are in response to the heartbeat of their listeners.

Mother speaks. Her immortal words which transform society at a time when man has lost his traditional values, nobler sentiments and peace of mind, in the frenzied attempt to reinforce the outer world of sensory pleasures, power and prestige. Man's senseless pursuit of these distractions, oblivious of his own Self, has cost him the harmony and graciousness of his life. Lack of faith, a sense of competition and fear have destroyed personal ties and family relations. Love has become a mirage in a culture of excessive consumerism.

Throughout the world today, the darshan and the nectar-like words of Mata Amritanandamayi Devi are effecting transformations in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. This book is a precious collection of conversations between the Holy Mother and Her disciples, devotees and inquiring visitors during the period from June 1985 to September 1986.

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